Seirei Tsukai no Blade Dance Volume 4

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These are most of the illustrations in Volume 4:

【著者】

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しみず・ゆう

(゜∀゜)o彡゜白タイツ！白タイツ！（←まるで成長していない…）４巻の表紙は残念可愛いリンスレットお嬢様。タイツ破きは永遠の浪漫ですよね。第二部突入でますます加速する『精霊使いの剣舞』、どうぞよろしくお願いいたします！

第四回ＭＦ文庫Ｊライトノベル新人賞受賞。なごみ系ケルトコメディ『やってきたよ、ドルイドさん！』シリーズ、お城擬人化ファンタジー『白銀の城姫』シリーズを上梓。写真はメ切前にひとりマニアックなボードゲームで遊ぶ作者（現実逃避中）。

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好きなことは絵を描くこと、睡眠。
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http://petitecerisier.moo.jp/

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精霊剣舞祭

精霊使いの剣舞 ブレイドダンス 4

志瑞祐
Illustration
桜はんぺん

MF文庫 J

MF文庫 J
L-04-10

精霊使いの剣舞 ブレイドダンス 4
精霊剣舞祭
志瑞祐

精霊剣舞祭

剣精霊の無双使い4

ブレイドダンス

志瑞祐

Illustration

桜はんぺん

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精霊使いの剣舞（ブレイドダンス）４　精霊剣舞祭

〈精霊剣舞祭（ブレイドダンス）〉開幕。クレアたちは晴れてアレイシア精霊学院代表として、開催地である元素精霊界（アストラル・ゼロ）の聖域ラグナ・イースに向かう。水着姿で禊ぎをしたりしてチームの結束を深めるクレアたちだが、突然、軍用精霊を操る謎の刺客に襲われる。その正体は、〈教導院〉時代にカミトを兄と呼んで慕った少女、ミュアだった。迫り来る過去に揺れるカミトの前に、闇精霊レスティアや、最強の剣舞姫レン・アッシュベルがついに姿を現し……。「あなたの過去が、あなたの大切なものを壊そうとしているわ」「――させない、そんなことは」変わらないもの。変わってしまったもの。置き去りのままの過去たちが、今この瞬間に絡み合う――。エレメンタル・ファンタジー第４弾！

MF文庫J 志瑞祐の本

やってきたよ、ドルイドさん！1～3［イラスト：絶叫］

白銀の城姫（ベルクフリート）１～３［イラスト：上田夢人］

精霊使いの剣舞（ブレイドダンス）　剣と学院と火猫少女
［イラスト：桜はんぺん］

精霊使いの剣舞（ブレイドダンス）２　ロスト・クイーン
［イラスト：桜はんぺん］

精霊使いの剣舞（ブレイドダンス）３　風の誓約
［イラスト：桜はんぺん］

精霊使いの剣舞（ブレイドダンス）４　精霊剣舞祭
［イラスト：桜はんぺん］

精霊剣舞祭

精霊使いの剣舞 ブレイドダンス 4

志瑞祐
Illustration
桜はんぺん

「ひゃ……
あ、んっ……」

身体をよじり、
くすぐったそうに悶えるエスト。
そんな反応が可愛くて、
カミトはつい――
こちょ。こちょこちょ。

「……あ、んっ、やめて……
ください……」

「――変わっていないわね、
そういうところは」

彼女はふっと肩をすくめると、
立ち上がってトン、と前に足を進めた。
カミトが反応する間もなく、つまさきを伸ばし――

「嬉しいわ、カミト」

そっと口づけした。

Kazehaya Kamito
カゼハヤ・カミト

Restia
レスティア

精霊使いの剣舞

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Prologue

Passages excavated in the solid bedrock were piled up in several layers.

A boy had been walking alone through the inside of the institution where crimson flames swirled.

He had glossy black hair. His attire covered his whole body in black and could be mistaken for darkness.

His girlish looks still retained some innocence, but his jet-black pupils were emotionless, only reflecting the flames that flickered inhumanly.

Who was it that destroyed the institution of the Instructional School, that had many combatants, in merely half a day?— The boy had no way of knowing.

Was it the capital's Spirit Knights, or an accident due to a rampaging sealed spirit?

The instructional teachers, who drilled combat skills into the boy, were nowhere to be found.

Had they escaped, or it might be that they were already dead.

If that was the case, the boy would be released and would become a free man.

But.

(Such things are trivial...)

The boy, who had his heart stolen away, had become apathetic to everything.

Except for her, the one and only exception.

The darkness spirit, Restia— the highest level sealed spirit that was given to him by the teachers of the institution.

The girl had granted light to his heart that was shut in darkness.

(She's the only one that I'll absolutely protect.)

Within the blazing flames, the boy's goal was the shrine that was beneath the institution.

In the shrine, there were many artifacts of sealed spirits that were illegally excavated by the Instructional School —that was strong enough to even be comparable to a small nation's military strength— resting.

The ring that sealed Restia should also be stored over there.

The spirit seal that was the proof of a spirit contract had not yet been engraved on the boy's hand.

The teachers of the institution were cautious of him possessing more power than necessary and had not permitted the exchanging of a spirit contract.

The boy held the power to exchange feelings with a spirit while having the body of a male— the same nature as the Demon King.

The teachers were afraid that he would rebel after contracting with the highest level darkness spirit.

"—Onii-sama!"

The sound of a girl came from behind.

"Muir?"

There was only one person who would call him onii-sama.

The boy turned around and saw a young girl behind him.

She had ash-grey hair that was tied up on both sides of her head.

Along with her blue clear pupils, she had lovely rose-bud-like lips.

Her skin that could be seen from the gaps of her black combat uniform was white like virgin snow.

"Muir, you still haven't escaped?"

"Mou, I was searching for you, onii-sama!"

The girl —Muir Alenstarl— pouted her cheeks like she was angry.

Naturally, the boy, who was an orphan, had no sisters.

'Onii-sama' was just something she called him willfully.

"What happened to those watching over us?"

"I killed them."

She answered without a flicker of her eyebrow.

"It's because they tried to hinder me from searching for onii-sama."

She neither boasted nor felt regret about the murder.

She just killed because it was a necessary task— It could be said to be something like that.

"I see..."

Although there was no sympathy for those who were killed.

As the ones who had raised her as a slaughtering weapon were none other than they themselves.

Muir Alenstarl was the Instructional School's second ranking combatant.

In this institution literally composed of monsters, the girl was nicknamed “Monster.”

While the boy held overwhelming combat skills, he had not yet killed even a single person. He was a being that drew the line.

"Onii-sama, you too, what are you doing here?"

This time, Muir was the one who asked.

"The ring that sealed Restia is in the underground shrine. I'm going to retrieve it."

"Ah, Onii-sama, as you already have Muir, you don't need things like contracted spirits."

Muir frowned with her cute lips, seemingly bored.

"That reminds me, where's Lily?"

Lily Flame was the seventh member attached to same unit as the boy and Muir.

"Lily? ...Uhmm, she might have been killed by the crimson giant."

"Crimson giant?"

"The thing that attacked the institution a few hours ago . That outrageously strong flame spirit."

At that instant.

The ground suddenly shook.

"—It's coming onii-sama!"

"....!?"

Suddenly, from the depths of the passage, he felt an intense presence.

Crimson flames, spouting out high, burned up the ceiling like it was nothing, and at that moment.

What appeared from within the flames was— a roaring giant of flames.

In its hand that was like a lump of lava, it was gripping a sword of blazing scarlet flames.

(A flame spirit? No, that's...)

It was not a simple flame spirit.

A hair-raising chill ran all over the boy's body.

That was the very symbol of destruction.

Just by looking straight at its existence, his mind began being scraped away.

(I'm certain— That's a **devil-class spirit**!)

It was the being that had destroyed the Instructional School, that held many elementalists, in merely a few hours.

It was said that the power of a devil-class spirit pulled through even a division of the spirit knights.

(This isn't an opponent I can fight without a contracted spirit...)

The flame spirit seemed to have noticed them.

Clad completely in flames, it melted the bedrock as it slowly approached them.

"Onii-sama, leave that to Muir."

Muir licked the ring placed on her small hand.

She planned on using an anti-spirit militarized spirit

"Muir, that is not a being that a human can manage."

"No problem. Muir isn't a human— Muir is a 'monster'."

An ominous spirit seal glowed on Muir's right hand.

No, that was not a spirit seal, but a Cursed Armament Seal that the Instruction School had given.

Jester's Vise — It was the reason why Muir was called Monster.

"Goodbye, Onii-sama."

"—Muir!!!"

The young boy stretched his hands out towards her shoulders and at that moment.

The crimson flames released by the giant thoroughly burned the boy's field of vision.

The **rampaging incident** of the spirit led to the destruction of the Instructional School

That was something from a year before the boy appeared at the front stage as the strongest blade dancer.

It was an event that occurred in a remote region of the empire that was not even marked on the map.

Chapter 1: Travel Preparation

Part 1

Chirp, chirp...

The twittering of birds from inside the Spirit Forest that surrounded the academy could be heard within the dorms.

"Mm..."

Opening his eyes and rising up from his bed, he found his own half-asleep face reflected in the window glass.

His black hair was ruffled from sleeping. He also had an insecure look in his eyes.

Compared to the innocent looks in his dream, his impression had changed greatly.

(Four years ago... huh?)

It had been a long time since he last had a dream about that period of time.

It was probably the first time he had one since coming to this academy.

To be frank, it was a memory he did not even want to recall...

Kamito unintentionally cast his sight down to his left hand, where a spirit seal was engraved.

The seal of the darkness spirit— the left hand which grasped victory at the Blade Dance three years ago.

(Now I am trying to return to that arena once more.)

With the Blade Dance drawing near, he was probably feeling emotionally overwrought without realizing it.

That must also have been why he had a dream about that period of time.

As he was about to get off his bed—

"....."

Kamito noticed something.

His body felt strangely heavy.

Something soft and pleasant was mounted on top of his waist.

"......?!"

Startled, Kamito flipped his blanket vigorously.

And then.

"Fua... Good morning, Kamito."

"E-Est?!"

A lovely voice rang, just like a bell.

The one straddling Kamito's waist— was a silver-haired beauty.

She had mysterious violet eyes. Her skin was white like freshly extracted milk.

The figure in question, who was rubbing her drowsy-looking eyelids, was just as lovely as a snow fairy.

The sword spirit Est. She was Kamito's contracted spirit, and was also entitled "Demon Slayer."

Apparently, she had snuck into Kamito's bed without him knowing.

On top of that, her attire was—

"What's wrong, Kamito?"

Still straddling his waist, Est looked down at him expressionlessly.

"H-Hey, your attire..."

Est was fully naked— No, she was not.

She was dressed up properly.

However—

"Kamito?"

Est tilted her head blankly. Kamito averted his eyes in a fluster.

Est was wearing Kamito's uniform shirt over her naked body.

She was probably not wearing underwear. Her attire was what called a naked-shirt[1].

From the exposed bosom, her slightly exposed white skin was strangely captivating.

The cuffs were big and excessive, but they gave him an unnecessary maniacal feeling nonetheless.

"Wha—? Est, why are you wearing my uniform?"

"Kamito told me that I can't sleep naked together with you."

Est replied expressionlessly.

Kamito was startled as soon as she tightly grabbed the chest area of the shirt.

"Yeah, I did tell you so."

Being at his wits' end, Kamito groaned.

"But please, at least put on some panties."

"...Pan...ties?"

"Why are you making that wondering face?!"

It might be the case that spirits have the habit of wearing knee-socks, but do not have the habit of wearing panties.

(...Nah, Restia did wear underwear properly.)

Just when he was thinking about that—

"Hm?"

Suddenly, Kamito felt something out of place about Est's appearance.

It was not just about her wearing a naked-shirt— There seemed to be something very different about Est this morning.

Kamito intently examined Est's whole body.

"Kamito... Um, if you stare at me that much, I'll get embarrassed."

The expressionless Est blushed in an unusual manner, squirmed on top of his waist and rubbed her knees together.

At that moment, Kamito finally realized it.

From the shirt-tail, her white thighs crept into sight.

And then came her slender and smooth ankles like sculptures made of marble.

What Est was wearing— wasn't her usual knee-high socks.

She was wearing short socks, the length of which was just about up to her ankles.

"Est, what's with those socks?"

"Well, I thought Kamito would be pleased with these kind of socks."

With her face still red, Est firmly pinned down the shirt-tail.

This was his first time seeing Est making such an expression.

It appeared that to her, exposing her bare feet was really embarrassing.

"Kamito, are you turned on by my short socks?"

"Nah, because I don't have such a maniacal fetish, you know?"

"...I see. That means this is still not enough to make you satisfied."

Est dropped her shoulders, seemingly disappointed.

"Still, it is quite impossible for me to show you my bare feet."

"I'm telling you, I don't have such a fetish."

Kamito groaned and shook his head. He really could not understand the spirits' sense of shame.

(Even so—)

It was the truth that his heart pounded at Est's expression of blushing and being bashful in an unusual manner.

The sword spirit was always calm and expressionless.

That was exactly why he wanted to try seeing more of her bashful expression.

(What will happen if I touch them, I wonder?)

Suddenly, Kamito's mind was tempted.

Anyhow, it was because Est, not any other girl, was bashful to this extent.

What would happen if he touched her bare feet? —He wanted to try seeing it.

"....."

Kamito quietly reached out his hand—

Coochy.

He tickled Est's small foot.

"...Hyan!"

A sweet voice leaked out from her lips.

Est's body bent with a start.

"...Kamito, what are you doing?!"

"Hm? I'm massaging you."

Coochy coochy.

"Hya...a-n..."

Twisting her body, Est was in agony, seemingly tickled.

Such a reaction was so cute that it drove Kamito to—

Coochy. *Coochy coochy coochy*.

"...A-n, please... Stop it..."

"No. This is your punishment."

"...Punishment?"

"Because Est is a bad girl for sneaking in my bed as she pleases."

Coochy coochy.

"Ann, Kami...to... Forgive... Me."

Tears were shed from Est's limpid eyes as she pleaded while gasping.

...As expected, she now looked a little pitiful.

"Have you reflected on your behavior?"

"Y...es..."

Kamito ceased tickling, and Est fell lying face-down in exhaustion.

Kamito gently held Est back as she flopped onto him.

"...Kamito is so mean."

Est pouted her lips in an unusual manner.

"My bad. Est is just so cute... So I did it without thinking."

He gently stroked Est's silver hair while making a bitter smile.

Just at that moment.

The room temperature rose instantly.

"...?!"

Gogogogogogogo...!

From behind him, a horrifying killing aura... No, heat was emitted.

When he turned around at the unpleasant premonition —

"Y-Y-You guys... Wh-Wh-Wh-Wh-What are you doing ?"

With her red twintails standing on end, the beautiful girl was trembling all over.

Her ruby eyes were imposing. Her lips had the color of cherry blossoms in early blooming. The bulge on her chest was just about the same as that of a kid, but that well-balanced proportion of hers was very charming.

Claire Rouge.

If it was appearance alone, she was exceptionally cute, an ultra beautiful girl without any exaggeration.

However, as she was now, she was more terrifying than any ferocious spirit.

"I-I've misjudged you. I-I didn't know you're such a pervert...!"

"Y-You got it wrong, Claire. This is, well, you see..."

Kamito was attempting to give an excuse while in a fluster, but—

For this particular instance, it was absolutely not a misunderstanding. There was no way to make an excuse.

"Kamito-kun, I think your foot-tickling play is indeed too maniacal."

Appearing from behind Claire, Fianna quietly cast her eyes down, seemingly sad.

It seemed like she had seen everything. ...He would rather die now.

"Kamito, how hot would you order me to grill you?"

Claire smiled pleasantly while holding her blazing Flametounge.

A smile of an angel that would make one unexpectedly fascinated.

"Medium rare... or so."

"Too bad. I only know roasting to cinders."

Claire raised her whip of flame overhead—

"—Turn into cinders already!"

Kamito was blown off towards the outside of the window.

Part 2

And so, Kamito greeted another morning just like usual, but—

After eating breakfast, the situation was a little different.

The bell sounding the start of classes had already rung long ago, yet everyone still remained in their rooms in the dorm.

"This one and this one. This one should be necessary too... Geez, Scarlet. Don't play with the luggage."

"Nyaa?"

The flame spirit in the form of a hell cat was playing by rolling Claire's outfits as if they were a yarn ball.

Seeing a glimpse of white underwear among that lump , Kamito averted his eyes in a hurry.

Claire and Fianna were sitting on each of their beds, packing stuff into their own bags.

They were preparing to head to Astral Zero, the stage of the Blade Dance.

It had been two weeks since Team Scarlet defeated the Silent Fortress — Velsaria Eva, who was ranked number one within the academy, and obtained the right to participate in the Blade Dance. Together with the two teams that got into the determined representative trio, they were going to fight to the bitter end several days from now on as a representative of the Ordesia Empire.

"Claire, did you get enough sleep yesterday?"

"Of course. Keeping your physical condition in control is the basics for an elementalist after all."

Claire nodded while holding back from yawning, which she had already been doing often.

Perhaps because of her sense of responsibility as the team leader, Claire had recently been reading a large number of tactical books and documents related to spirits , which she had borrowed from the library, until the dead of the night.

"Don't push yourself too hard. We won't know the battle system until an oracle of the Elemental Lords is issued."

"Yes, I know. Still, it's necessary to prepare countermeasures in advance. Those who participate in the Blade Dance are the most elite elementalists representing each country— It won't be so easy that you can win without countermeasures. Besides, that the strongest blade dancer is also taking part in this tournament after all."

"...Yeah, you're right."

Kamito nodded with a bitter face.

The strongest blade dancer — Ren Ashbell.

The winner at the Blade Dance three years ago.

(...Not me, but another Ren Ashbell.)

Who exactly was she? And what was her goal...?

He had to figure that out.

Kamito tightly clenched his left hand, which was covered in a leather glove.

Regardless of what her objectives might be, there was no doubt that the transformed Restia was acting together with her.

"And you, are you done with packing already?"

Holding on to the nape of Scarlet, who was struggling and mewing—

This time it was Claire who asked.

In contrast with Claire's traveling bag, which was filled up till the point where it was about to burst, Kamito's bag was small.

"Yeah, I don't have much stuff to carry after all."

Kamito, who had been wandering aimlessly until just two months ago, carried with him almost no personal belongings.

A few daggers used for throwing and, it wasn't baggage but— he had the elemental waffe, the sword Terminus Est, in the sword-belt on his hips. Est was offended by what happened this morning and went to sleep in her sword form. ...It was unlikely she would wake up anytime soon.

But then again, if one was to offend a high-ranking spirit of Est's level, normally one had to be ready for the kind of damage like a town being destroyed.

"....."

For those two, it seemed that they still needed more time to pack.

(...Well, they are girls of noble status after all.)

They probably needed various things that a guy like Kamito would have no idea about.

Claire had been randomly stuffing in a bunch of canned peaches for a while, but that made him feel a little uneasy.

"Hm?"

Suddenly, Kamito cast his eyes down the floor, where stuff was strewn all over the place.

There were some books that looked like novels mixed among tactical books and documents related to spirits.

Having too much time to spare, Kamito casually picked up one of them.

'The wandering prince and the imprisoned princess'—A romance novel aimed at teens, with many illustrations in it.

(Seriously, it's surprising that Claire likes this kind of stuff.)

When he tried skimming lightly through its first part out of curiosity—

"Wha-?!"

Kamito's face turned red in a flash.

The contents of the book were about a beautiful princess who got abducted by a cruel prince and had all sorts of things done to her that could hardly be expressed in words—It was that kind of hardcore stuff.

"Y-You... H-Have you been reading this kind of stuff?!"

"Eh?"

Claire turned around.

And then, when she recognized what Kamito was holding in his hands,

"Fuaaaa, g-g-g-give it back! What the hell are you reading without permission?!"

Thump. Thud.

She hit him with the peach cans in her hands.

"Whoa... Are you planning to kill me?!"

"It's your punishment for peeping into a m-maiden's secret! You deserve to die ten thousand times!"

"Then don't leave your maiden's secret on the floor."

"S-Shut up~! Idiot! Pervert!"

Bursting into tears, Claire hit him repeatedly and violently.

...At this rate, he might lose his life before participating in the Blade Dance.

"Hey, you are being annoying."

"B-But Kamito—"

Taking the chance when Claire turned towards Fianna —

Kamito opened a page of the book and showed it in front of Claire.

It was a page containing an illustration in which the princess, the heroine of the story, was being tied up with a rope and getting whipped.

"...?!"

"Isn't Claire more of a pervert?"

"...Eh?"

Claire's shoulders turned stiff with a start.

"A noble young lady reading such a vulgar book, don't you feel any shame?"

"W-Well, um..."

The high-class young lady blushed and mumbled in hesitation.

Upon seeing Claire in such a state—

Kamito got a feeling of wanting to play around with her a little.

(...Well, there I go wanting to tease her again.)

It was probably because her act of blushing in embarrassment looked strangely cute.

Moving his face close to Claire's ear, he whispered softly.

"I wonder how everyone will think if they learn that the young lady, whose test results are also top-class, enjoys reading this kind of obscene books."

"Fuaa, wh-wh-wh-what are you saying?!"

"Could it be that you want to get things like stuff in this book done to you?"

"Th-That's not true! How could I want to be tied up like this?!"

"You know, this page has a fold on it."

"...~Fuaaan!"

A tiny cloud of steam erupting from her head, Claire crawled into her bed.

"...Seriously, she's the same green young lady as ever."

Having escaped from his life crisis, Kamito took a sigh of relief, and—

This time he turned towards Fianna.

"Is your preparation going well?"

"...Hmm, it seems that my ritual equipment is going to be bulky no matter what."

Said Fianna while stuffing a large round mirror and a candlestick into her bag.

Fianna Ray Ordesia.

She was the second princess of the Ordesia Empire, and also the princess maiden ranked second at the Divine Ritual School, a training institution for Queens who served the Five Great Elemental Lords.

A genuine princess, who was once even chosen as a candidate for the Queen of the Elemental Lord of Flame.

However, she was by no means haughty, and was very easy to talk to.

Strictly speaking though, she was at a social status where Kamito and the like were not even allowed to look at her face.

"If you don't mind, I'll lend you a hand. Can I pack the stuff around here however I want?"

"Yes, that will be of help."

Kamito sat down on the bed, where stuff was all over the place, and started stuffing a bag with all kinds of equipment that appeared to be used in rituals.

Rosaries, royal goblets, folding fans, whips, candles, and even things that looked like beast ears and tails—

(Are these things really equipment for rituals?)

Such a question suddenly flitted through his mind, however--

(Well, I'm also just a beginner when it comes to princess maidens' rituals after all.)

—That was when his hand, which reached out casually , grabbed something.

A smooth and nice touch of cloth.

(...What's this?)

Knitting his eyebrows, he tried holding it up before his eyes, and then—

"...?!"

Kamito turned stiff in that posture.

It was a glossy black piece of cloth.

A thin lace embroidery with a rose pattern on it.

The material was probably silk. There were thin strings attached at both ends of the cloth piece.

"Err..."

Cold sweat gradually emerged on Kamito's forehead.

A high class-looking black pair of underwear.

On top of that—

(Wh-Why is there a hole here?!)

It wasn't torn off. For some reason, there was an unnatural cut at the center.

(This seems to have no meaning as underwear—)

"Ka-Kamito-kun?!"

"Ah—"

Suddenly, his eyes met Fianna's, who raised her face at him.

Kamito was still unfolding the black pair of underwear in front of him.

"....."

"....."

"Um..."

Fianna's face turned bright red—

"D-Do you... hate a princess who would wear this kind of shameful underwear?"

She asked him with upturned eyes.

"N-No, I mean, my bad...!"

With his heart pounding, Kamito hurriedly put the underwear back inside the bag.

"Wh-Why do you have such underwear?"

"I went and bought it on an impulse... b-but it is indeed embarrassing."

She muttered with her face still bright red.

...It seemed that she really was embarrassed.

This princess always said shocking things and teased Kamito, but she was actually a green girl, just like Claire.

"...I wonder... if that was a little too daring."

"Y-You're right. A little... yeah."

Ahem, or so Kamito coughed.

What blew away that awkward atmosphere for them was a voice which could be heard coming from outside the room.

"Geez, you're still preparing, Claire Rouge?"

A somewhat high-pitched and elegant voice.

The one who appeared in front of the room was—

Claire's rival and classmate in her Raven classroom.

It was Rinslet Laurenfrost, the demon ice elementalist.

She had dazzlingly beautiful platinum blonde hair. Her emerald green eyes were topped by lovely eyebrows .

At a glance, she appeared to be a proud highborn lady, but Kamito knew that she was a very kind and caring girl .

"Milady, I'm sleepy~"

"Geez, Carol is always such a sleepyhead."

The one being dragged by her was Carol the maid.

"Milady, you know that unlike you, my blood pressure is low... Hwa."

Apparently she had been woken up by Rinslet this morning.

...She was the same useless maid as ever.

"Rinslet, what is that thing?"

Claire, having finally revived, asked thus.

Rinslet was carrying a largish wooden box in her hands.

"Hmph, it's a tea set of highest grade. A lady of the Laurenfrost family must stay elegant at all times."

Rinslet proudly combed her platinum blonde hair upward.

"You know what, we aren't going out to play."

Claire shrugged her shoulders in amazement.

And then, this time they could hear Ellis' voice coming from outside the window.

"What are you lot doing?! It's already *one hour* until the gathering time, you know!"

"You're just too early!"

Claire turned at the overly serious knight captain and yelled.

(...Unifying this team seems to be quite a long-term difficult task.)

Kamito shrugged his shoulders with a sense of irony while putting the baggage in order.

Part 3

One hour later.

Members of Team Scarlet gathered in front of the stone circle, which was their rally point.

It was a Gate to Astral Zero located within the premises of Areishia Spirit Academy.

This historic ruin itself was something that had been in existence long before the academy was built, but it was by no means part of the Empire's technology. The status quo was that the technology which preserved the Gates

which opened to this world, had been lost completely, excluding such ruins, which remained at various places around the continent.

From now on, representative fighters would be moving to Astral Zero and then boarding a ship prepared by the Divine Ritual School, which administered the Blade Dance.

In front of the Gate, the other two teams that had been selected from the academy had also gathered already.

Team Wyvern, ranked first, was a team composed of only upperclassmen.

They gave each member of Team Scarlet a sharp glance, and then suddenly looked away. They had no intention of getting along—that was probably what they were declaring. Their reaction was natural. After all, although both teams were selected from the same academy, they would become each other's rival when the Blade Dance actually began.

(Besides—)

With that in mind, Kamito looked at Claire with a side glance.

There was another reason for the glance of the upperclassmen being prickly.

The younger sister of Calamity Queen, who had brought about the unprecedented disaster to the empire four years ago.

There were still many students in the academy with unpleasant thoughts about her existence.

Claire did not seem to particularly care about that, but she was probably suffering in her heart.

"Mu, you guys again—"[2]

Thus a blonde girl holding a wooden staff started talking to Kamito.

"'Sup, savage girl. It's been a while."

"Muu, I'm not a savage girl!"

The lovely petite girl puffed out her cheeks in anger.

This person was a member of the third ranked Team Cernunnos, whom they had fought against before.

She was from the Druid clan, who grew up in the Spirit Forest and used a powerful beast swarm spirit.

As an opponent whom they may fight in the future, she was quite a strong rival.

"I will be sure to crush the likes of you guys underfoot with my beast swarm spirit!"

The druid girl held up her wooden staff as she snickered.

And then, heading over there—

"Hmph, so you three teams have finally gathered?"

The teacher Freya Grandol, the manager of the Gate, came walking briskly.

As she cast a glance up at the clock tower of the academy,

"I'm going to transport all of you to Astral Zero after ten minutes. Now finish saying goodbye to your friends in the meantime."

Saying thus, she started drawing a magical formation inside the stone circle.

Claire, Rinslet, and Fianna restlessly looked away from each other.

"Th-There's no need to say goodbye or anything."

"Th-That's right. We're just leaving the academy for a mere few days after all."

"Y-Yes, that sounds exaggerating."

The three of them simultaneously nodded to one another.

(Come to think of it, all of them had no friends.)

...This group of young ladies sure had it tough.

(Well, I'm also in no place to say that about people, though—)

Meanwhile, Ellis was surrounded and overwhelmed by a crowd of junior knights.

Her reddish brown eyes were imposing. Her blue ponytail was swaying in the gentle breeze.

Apparently, Ellis would be going to the Blade Dance wearing her knight armor as well.

That was probably her expression of determination of being a representative of the academy and also the Sylphid Knights at the same time.

"Captain, please fight for us as well!"

"We're rooting for you!"

"Yeah, I will definitely claim victory!"

Ellis nodded at the words of Rakka and Reishia, her two former teammates.

They had entrusted Ellis with their dream for the Blade Dance championship.

And then, one more person—

Kamito knew that there was a girl who had entrusted her with a dream.

Kamito whispered to Ellis, who had returned after saying goodbye to her juniors.

"Ellis, that ribbon looks good on you."

"Y-You think so...?"

Ellis blushed and fidgeted with her fingers.

Binding her ponytail was a white ribbon.

It was something which Ellis' elder foster-sister entrusted to her before leaving the academy.

"Now that I'm wearing this, I feel like Aneue is watching over me."

Ellis suddenly smiled.

Seeing her defenseless face from the side, Kamito spontaneously felt his heart pound again.

"The time has come. Everyone, get inside the stone circle."

Freya traced a stone pillar with her fingertips, and blue rays of light gushed forth from the earth's surface.

A Gate connecting this world and Astral Zero emerged .

Kamito and his group nodded to each other and stepped inside the shining stone circle.

Part 4

A dazzling flash of light. And then a fleeting intoxicating sensation as though heaven and earth were turned upside-down.

"H-m..."

Opening their eyes, what first sprang into their field of vision was—

All kinds of trees in a dense forest, and a grand lake occupying a large area within it.

A lake that looked like the polished surface of a mirror , which existed only in Astral Zero. At the lake shore where water plants grew thickly, countless faint, flickering light orbs were floating and creating a wondrous scene.

"I have come to this lake before, during the academy's training camp."

Claire firmly descended on the muddy ground.

Members of other teams were also sent to the site one after another.

"By the way, where's the ship?"

Kamito looked around the surface of the lake.

A ship-like object was nowhere to be found.

"Where are you looking? Look, over there—"

Claire shrugged her shoulders and pointed at the sky peeking through the gaps of trees.

"Hm?"

When he raised his head—

An outline of a ship was floating in the sky casting its huge shadow on the lake.

"That's... the Belphal-class flying ship of the Divine Ritual School..."

Kamito opened his eyes and groaned.

A state-of-the-art flying ship named after the Elemental Lord of Wind.

He had heard about it in the rumors, but this was his first time seeing the real thing.

It had a form like that of a streamlined whale. Apparently its power source was a spirit engine made in the Kingdom of Balstan, and they used an over 6000 year old sacred tree as material for the exterior.

It was the ship which would lead elementalists, who would dedicate their blade dances to the Elemental Lords , to the stage of the Blade Dance.

"Kamito, we are definitely going to win the grand prize."

"Yeah."

Kamito nodded, and tightly clenched his left hand.

(...We have crawled all the way up for the sake of gaining the qualification to board that ship.)

Claire, for the sake of learning the truth related to the incident that her elder sister caused.

Kamito, for the sake of regaining the contracted spirit that he had lost.

Then Ellis, Fianna, and Rinslet—

Everyone there was joining in the Blade Dance with their respective wish harbored in mind.

The flying ship caused flashy splashes as it landed on the lake.

Part 5

"—Looks like the boy has already headed over there."

Areishia Spirit Academy, office room.

Greyworth Ciel Mais faced the wall of the room and spoke.

There was no response—However, immediately from inside the wall, a person's shadow emerged as if it was seeping out.

"Yes ma'am. Just a while ago."

It was the teacher Freya Grandol, the shadow elementalist.

She approached Greyworth's office desk, and then spoke without hesitation.

"Still, Headmistress, I cannot understand why you would go that far to support that boy."

"What do you mean?"

"His fighting skills are certainly overwhelming, but the Blade Dance isn't something as lenient as to allow someone to win with just that. You should be the one who knows that best."

"Yeah, it's just as you said. The boy still can't win against the strongest blade dancer as he is now. At the very least, I would like to have him awaken before the real war starts, but—"

"What do you mean?"

"Nah, just random silly talk."

Greyworth shook her head as if to evade the question.

"More importantly, has the investigation on that matter been completed?"

"Yes. I would like you to be moderate and stop using me to spy on the army, though."

"I've been feeling sorry about that, you know."

Greyworth shrugged her shoulders, and then Freya rudely threw down the report.

"That's the data about the incident four years ago. After the collapse of the institution in question— the Instructional School, there were 14 orphans taken into protection by the order of imperial knights. Rumors say that five of them have been admitted into the special forces of the knight order. The remaining nine died several years later under the effect of the Cursed Armament Seals given to them by the institution, or so they say."

"Still, that means the number doesn't match. It conflicts with the data found at the institution."

"Apparently it was not the case that all orphans were taken into protection by the knight order. Jio Inzagi, who broke into our academy the other day, was also one of the institution's orphans whom the knight order has little information about. It probably wouldn't be strange for there to be other unconfirmed orphans besides him out there."

"I see..."

What came to Greyworth's mind was the eyes of the boy whom she met four years ago.

In the eyes of that boy, who declared indifferently on that day—that he had come to kill the Dusk Witch, there was no hatred, nor was there anger, only an unfathomable nothingness.

(The same kid as the boy back then, huh...)

Young children who got their heart plundered and were raised as battle weapons.

Though they were also elementalists, they were basically different from noble girls who grew up at the academy.

"Headmistress?"

"It's nothing. You did a good job. Please continue your investigation as is."

"Seriously, my main job isn't a spy but a teacher, you know."

Freya once again disappeared into the wall while complaining.

Greyworth gazed outside the window, and then suddenly took a heavy breath.

"A militarized spirit and an orphan from Instructional School — Is *she* actually planning to incite war or something?"

The Dusk Witch was succumbing to impatience.

The strongest blade dancer had yet to awaken.

He was certainly strong.

Even in an academy where first-rate elementalists gather, his power was overwhelming.

However, that was, at its best, just a story in the miniature garden called academy.

As he was now, he absolutely could not win against her.

Neither could Ren Ashbell of three years ago do that—

"Please, successor of the Demon King— Because even I don't have much time left now."

Greyworth suppressed her pounding heart as she curled her lips ironically.

Chapter 2: Sky Voyage

Part 1

Hovering over the ether-filled clouds, the flying ship advanced as though it were gliding.

The destination was one of the sanctuaries located in Astral Zero--the floating island of Ragna Ys.

It was the venue to be used for the current Blade Dance festival.

Normally, it was a sanctuary that only permitted the coming and going of the Divine Ritual Institute's princess maidens who served the Elemental Lords. But during the Blade Dance, it was specially opened to ordinary people.

"I can't help but say this. This flying ship is too awesome, right?"

Looking out the window, Kamito gazed down at the vast sea of clouds and felt a little dizzy.

This was hardly surprising, seeing as it was his first time riding a flying ship.

The young ladies of noble birth seemed to be used to it already. After putting down their luggage, the team went to their assigned lounge and took a break on the sofa.

The walls were made of polished marble tiles while the floor was even covered by a beautifully embroidered red carpet.

The cabin was furnished with abundant supplies of everyday necessities, all of them top class in quality.

"By the way, it doesn't shake at all?"

"This is the latest model of flying ship, you know? If the journey goes smoothly, we'll probably arrive around noon or so."

The one answering was Claire, lying on the sofa... It was no big deal, but her current posture was hiking up her skirt and on the verge of exposing her panties. Hence , Kamito frantically shifted his gaze away.

"Oh right, the competition's opening ceremony will be held tonight at the castle hotel. Did you bring formal clothes for a ball?"

"No I didn't. I'd rather be excused from balls."

Recalling the Blade Dance three years earlier, Kamito whispered with an embarrassed look.

To be honest, the ballroom scene had left him with traumatic memories.

"I see..."

For some reason, Claire's murmurs sounded a bit disappointed.

"...? Will I cause trouble for you by not bringing formal clothes?"

"O-Of course not!"

Blushing red, Claire turned her head away and ignored Kamito.

"What are you getting mad about..."

"I-I'm not mad, okay... Idiot."

"Please, the two of you. Must you quarrel even on the ship?"

Rinslet shrugged in exasperation.

"Rinslet, what are you doing?"

On the table, Rinslet was arranging the tea set she had brought.

"I'm going to make tea now. Would everyone like to enjoy some afternoon tea together?"

"Great idea, I've heard long ago that the tea leaves produced in the Laurenfrost region are especially sweet and soothing."

"Indeed, although it is currently the eve before the Blade Dance, a suitable level of relaxation is still required ."

Originally outside, enjoying the scenery, Fianna and Ellis gathered back around the table.

Apparently, no matter what time or place, gracefully enjoying afternoon tea was customary for these high-class young ladies.

Rinslet elegantly poured tea into the dainty teacups. A citrous fragrance spread through the entire room along with the steam.

"Thanks. Wow... So fragrant."

Claire offered honest praise.

"This is orange tea special to the Laurenfrost region."

"Fufu, the tea brewed by milady is really delicious."

Carol the maid giggled and smiled.

"Isn't brewing tea normally part of the maid's job?"

No sooner had Kamito remarked...

"What are you talking about!? If my cute little Carol were to be scalded by accident, would you be able to compensate?"

"Uh, sorry..."

For some reason, Kamito was scolded soundly by Rinslet.

As a side note, only invited humans were allowed to enter the sanctuary, but because Carol belonged to the

Laurenfrost family—in other words, she was Rinslet's personal possession—she was given special permission to accompany Rinslet.

But in actual fact, Rinslet was apparently quite displeased about Carol being treated as an object.

"Kamito-san, how many spoonfuls of sugar would you like?"

"Oh, just one please."

"Claire, two spoonfuls for you, is that right?"

"Hey, why did you memorize my preference?"

"I-I didn't memorize it, okay! I simply recalled by chance!"

Rinslet yelled angrily with her face all red.

"Milady and Claire-sama used to play together often in the past."

"Eh... Really?"

Kamito asked the smiling Carol.

"Yes, Claire-sama used to be very very attached to milady—"

"Hold it right there. W-What nonsense are you talking about!?"

"T-That's right, Claire and I are rivals!"

Rinslet angrily turned her face away.

"No sugar in mine, please."

"As expected of a princess, knowing the best drinking method for appreciating tea."

Rinslet nodded happily to concur.

At this moment, Ellis sudden coughed dryly once...

"I-I would like milk tea with a generous serving of sugar, please."

Her voice sounded a bit shy.

"Yeah yeah, milk tea, isn't that right?"

"I-In addition..."

"Hmm?"

"If possible, please add fresh cream and honey with floating marshmallows on top..."

"W-What is with your demands!?"

Rinslet's face twitched slightly after hearing Ellis.

"Your method of drinking tea is sacrilege to tea itself!"

"I-I have always drank tea this way! In order to survive the harsh sword training, intaking ample sugar is necessary."

"Good grief, the Fahrengart family with its military tradition is truly..."

"The Sylphid Knights' captain turns out to be unexpectedly childish. To think you'd be ignorant of how to appreciate the delicate flavor of tea."

"S-Shut up! Sweet things are tastier to begin with!"

Seeing Claire cast a pitying gaze towards her, Ellis tearfully retorted.

Watching this back and forth exchange between them...

(These two girls seem to have let go of their former grudges too...)

Kamito smiled wryly in his heart.

For quite a long while, due to being in opposition to the Sylphid Knights, Claire had always been on poor terms with Ellis who stood as the captain of the aforementioned Knights. Ellis had only joined Team Scarlet two weeks earlier. Back when they first started group training, the two girls often had arguments.

These arguments were sparked by all sorts of strange reasons, but in the vast majority of cases, it was due to Claire inexplicably objecting whenever Ellis suggested partnering with Kamito since they were both close range combatants...

This was hardly surprising. The two girls had completely different personalities.

Although they were both excellent students, Ellis was the very rigid, hardworking type while Claire was the genius type who did as she pleased. The only thing they had in common was their competitiveness.

Precisely because of that, the atmosphere was very tense between them during the first week. However...

"I can't believe this, you actually put honey into the tea ..."

"T-That is the way I like it! If you have so many objections, why not have a taste for yourself first!?"

"Hmph, how could something so sickeningly sweet possibly be good... Eh?"

Claire took a small sip from Ellis' teacup and widened her eyes slightly.

"What is the matter?"

"...It's not bad, there seems to be a kind of gentle taste."

"I know, right?"

"But this does ruin the flavor of high-quality black tea. At most, it's just a bad kid's drink."

"Y-You might have a point..."

By now, the two girls' relationship had grown to the point that they were able to argue casually like this.

"...By the way, your hell cat spirit is so cute."

While saying that, Ellis reached out to stroke Scarlet who was curled up in a ball on the sofa.

Using her fingertips to play with Scarlet's soft and fuzzy tail, she also pressed on the pads on the cat's paws.

"Hey hey hey, Scarlet is my contracted spirit. Don't touch Scarlet so carelessly."

"J-Just a little should be fine..."

Ellis tightly hugged Scarlet affectionately while pouting.

It turned out that the rigid Captain of the Knights had an unexpectedly soft spot for cute things.

(...Come to think of it, she also kept things like stuffed dolls in her room.)

"Meow meoow!"

Scarlet cried out uneasily and sought Claire for help.

"I already told you to let Scarlet go. Don't you have your own contracted spirit!?"

"But Simorgh's appearance is too uncute..."

Ellis murmured in a sulking manner.

...If Ellis' contracted spirit were to overhear this, it would surely run away from home in exasperation.

"Ellis!"

"Just a little while longer, please let me play more with Scarlet."

Ellis continued to hug Scarlet stubbornly. At this moment...

"Meow meow! Meoooww!"

"Ah!"

Fast as an arrow, Scarlet escaped from Ellis' arms and bolted from the room.

Claire sighed in exasperation.

"Didn't I say already? Apart from me, Scarlet won't let other humans get intimate with her."

"How can you say that with a straight face? Could you stop using my Fenrir as your pillow?"

Rinslet glared and threw a sideways glance at Claire.

"...B-But Fenrir feels so nice and cool."

On the sofa, Claire was resting her head against the back of a white wolf with long fur.

The high-level demon ice spirit Fenrir was whimpering softly, looking rather troubled.

(...I know how you feel.)

Treated as a slave spirit by Claire, Kamito could not help but sympathize with Fenrir.

"Fufu, Kamito-kun, you may use my bosom as a pillow any time you want. I don't mind at all."

"...Please don't joke around with me, Your Highness the Princess."

Kamito poked Fianna lightly in the forehead.

"...Jeez, I'm not joking at all."

Fianna bit her index finger gently and pouted unhappily.

"Sigh, I'll need to go look for Scarlet later. With a ship this big, it'll be a tiring search."

Saying that, Claire sighed deliberately in an exaggerated manner. Seeing that, Ellis turned to stare into the distance.

"Speaking of which, the other countries' representatives are also on this flying ship, right?"

"Yeah, apart from us, a number of teams should have already boarded the ship along the way."

Claire nodded to answer Kamito's question.

Kamito placed his cup of tea onto the table...

"What about Ren Ashbell, the Strongest Blade Dancer?"

"...!?"

As soon Kamito spoke, the room was filled with a tense atmosphere.

Because his words carried an indescribable sense of pressure.

"No, she's not on this ship."

Claire shook her head calmly and said:

"Because for this Blade Dance, she is participating as a representative for the Alphas Theocracy. So even if she's traveling by ship, it'll be a different one."

"I see."

"But this is still so hard to accept."

"I know. It's hard to believe that an elementalist of her strength would run over to represent a country like the Alphas Theocracy."

Rinslet spoke with puzzlement and Claire concurred.

The Alphas Theocracy was a small country sandwiched between two great nations: the Ordesia Empire and the Dragon Empire of Dracunia on the east and west respectively. Although its main exports were spirit crystals excavated from mines, the Theocracy actually made its massive fortune through the excavation and trade of artifacts from ancient ruins.

Among the ancient artifacts unearthed by the Alphas Theocracy, there were many that held extremely powerful sealed spirits inside them. It was said that

during the past Ranbal War, the Theocracy made astronomical profits as the only neutral nation by supplying various countries with militarized spirits.

Furthermore, although it was impossible to substantiate, it was rumored that the black market organization Murders was also headquartered in the Theocracy, hence garnering eyes of suspicion from the other countries.

For a country like that to have survived all this time without being invaded by its large neighbors, apart from the Hierarch's shrewd diplomatic clout, its strategic location between two opposing superpowers also played a major role.

"Besides, it's already been fifty years since the last time the Theocracy sent representatives to take part in the Blade Dance. And they've never won. Why would they suddenly..."

Ren Ashbell was already the idol for all girls aspiring to be elementalists.

Why was everyone's idol representing a small country that only had negative publicity? Claire and the others could not understand at all.

"Speaking of the Alphas Theocracy, there are rumors of them buying militarized spirits on a large scale."

Ellis crossed her arms before her chest while speaking quietly.

"Why would they need to gather militarized spirits at this time...?"

Also, things were not that simple.

There were other reasons why the Alphas Theocracy was regarded as a dangerous element.

(I think I recall that it's also where Demon King worship originated?)

Demon King worshiping was secretly taking root in various places over the continent.

Allegedly, the Alphas Theocracy was the headquarters .

After all, that country's capital was where Demon King Solomon was born.

The Demon King's worshipers believed firmly that the Demon King would descend upon the Alphas Theocracy again.

Demon King... This word caused an inexplicable beating in Kamito's heart.

(Those people who raised me were also a branch of the Demon King worshipers...)

The Instructional School had tried to create their own Demon King through human methods.

Hence, they offered their blessing to Kamito, the male elementalist, and bestowed upon him the highest ranked darkness spirit who had been commanded by the former Demon King in the past.

"By the way, there's really so little information about Ren Ashbell."

Claire shrugged and said:

"All that's known is she suddenly appeared three years ago, an elementalist without any background. She is sixteen years old like us and contracted to a darkness spirit. That's all we know about her at the moment."

In order to win the Blade Dance, apart from prowess in using spirits, collecting information about opponents was an important part.

The Academy had provided information on some of the other teams, such as the attributes of contracted spirits, the form of elemental waffen, but there was almost nothing regarding the all-important Ren Ashbell.

Nothing was confirmed, not only for Ren Ashbell herself but also the entire team.

(An elementalist whose true identity and goal are both unknown huh...)

It would be fine if she was just an imposter using the legendary elementalist's name and title as a ruse.

But things could not possibly be that simple.

(Greyworth said, as long as I defeat her...)

The reason why she recruited Kamito to the Academy was for defeating her in the Blade Dance.

(Also...)

Kamito looked at his leather gloved left hand.

(No mistake about it. Restia is currently working together with that imposter.)

Several weeks earlier, a battle had taken place at an abandoned mine between Kamito and friends against one of the Instructional School's orphans: Jio Inzagi.

...Because this is *her* wish.

Back then, that was what Restia had said.

Furthermore, she also said: "One day, you will surely encounter each other."

The darkness spirit girl's transfiguration.

If her transfiguration was related to the other Ren Ashbell...

(I will absolutely not forgive that girl.)

Kamito's clenched fist was silently shaking under the table.

"But I never thought I would be standing on the same stage as her, in just a few hours' time."

Ellis suddenly murmured with heartfelt emotion.

"Three years ago, I was still in the audience, watching her first battle."

"I also saw her match against Velsaria. She really was so pretty."

"Ren Ashbell's blade dancing is superb, right?"

Ellis' cheeks were blushing slightly while Claire and Rinslet were nodding and concurring.

Kamito turned his face away with an embarrassed look.

"Oh dear, there's no need to make such a big fuss, okay ? Even if she's known as the Strongest Blade Dancer, that was three years ago already. Her power is probably getting more and more exaggerated by rumors. That girl actually isn't that amazing, right?"

Just as he shrugged and finished...

"W-What nonsense are you babbling!?"

"Are you a fool?"

"Oh please, there should be limits to ignorance."

"Uh, no, I'm sorry..."

Facing angry glares from the three high-class ladies, Kamito had no choice but to apologize frantically.

(...It's not like I can tell them that the real one is standing right here before their eyes.)

Fearing that he would collapse from the girls ganging up on him, Kamito suddenly rose up and left his place at the table.

"Where are you going?"

"Nowhere in particular. Just gonna look for Scarlet a bit."

Kamito made an excuse and made his way towards the exit.

"Hmph, he fled..."

"Fufu, Kamito-kun is such a poor dear."

As the only one privy to Kamito's true identity here, Fianna giggled secretly to herself.

Part 2

Four thousand meters up in the air...

A small combat vessel had appeared directly underneath the flying ship that the Blade Dance participants were traveling on.

It had been lurking in a forest, waiting for its prey to arrive.

The metal cabin door opened and out walked a young-looking girl.

Her ash-gray hair, tied up on the opposite sides of her, was swaying in the strong wind blowing head on.

"...Gotcha, Onii-sama."

The girl smiled and began to chant the incantation for a spirit's release.

Instantly, the ring on her middle finger gave off red light.

Next...

"Okay, let's rampage! Annihilation spirit Death Gaze!"

As the air cracked open, out emerged a giant black monster.

Chapter 3: Dracunia's Dragon Princess

Part 1

On ascending to the ship's deck they could see clouds drifting by at terrifying speeds.

Actually, the ship was at a speed whereby a person's body would be blown away in a flash by the blowing winds, but not even the sound of the wind could be heard thanks to a spirit magic barrier enclosing the ship.

Looking down from the side of the airship, an eerie forest stretched out into the distance.

Kamito was looking down at the forest and—

"Areishia Spirit Academy representative, Kazehaya Kamito, I presume?"

A voice came from behind him.

"......?"

Turning around, a beautiful elite-looking girl with shoulder-length hair was there.

A beret adorned her head. A black surcoat with not a single wrinkle.

She was probably about the same age as Kamito, and she was glaring at Kamito with strong-willed-looking pupils.

"Who are you? Why do you know my name?"

"You're famous. The only male elementalist on the continent."

She told him while maintaining a rigid expression.

Contrary to her magnificent appearance, her aura was thorny.

"Also, someone who plays around with women and then throws them away."

"Wait, what am I famous for!?"

Kamito yelled that out immediately.

"It's useless to attempt to deceive me. Dracunia's prized intelligence gathering agency is the finest in the continent, after all."

"Yeah, your prized espionage agents are definitely incompetent—wait, Dracunia?"

Kamito asked with knitted brows.

The Dracunia Dragon Duchy.

Located to the west of the Empire, it was a country that employed the strongest magic beasts, the dragons, in their military.

"Dracunia's representative, huh?"

"Yes, Leader of the Knights of the Dragon Emperor — Leonora Lancaster."

The beautiful girl in military uniform kept her eyes on him as she named herself.

"......Leonora."

Kamito said with a sigh.

He had heard that name from Claire.

(If I remember, "Dragon Princess" was the title given to Dracunia's representing ace.....)

By popular opinion, she was the one known as an equal to Velsaria.

"What business does the ace of Dracunia have with me ?"

Kamito put up his guard and readied himself.

The Blade Dance was not just a festival.

The Divine Ritual Institute would never admit it, but it was also a representative war of knights between nations .

The country whose elementalist or elementalist team won would be granted the Elemental Lord's protection for several years and this blessing would lead to the nation prospering.

The reason many countries trained elementalists was for this reason.

And there were also many countries that had no choice but to use certain methods to grasp victory as a consequence.

"Trying to kill me off before the Blade Dance begins?"

"What a stupid idea."

But Leonora gently shook her head.

"Failing to send the Silent Fortress to compete, the Ordesia Empire will be no match for us, the Knights of the Dragon Emperor. We will demolish you soundly on the Blade Dance stage, fair and square."

"Then, why?"

In front of the suspicious Kamito, she squirmed lightly with a red face.

"I, well, I, um, that is, your.....I came to cut off that."

While averting her eyes from Kamito, she smoothly drew out a large sword.

"Wh-why are you taking out your sword!?"

Kamito backed away.

If her words were true, she hadn't come to assassinate him.

Then, why exactly—

"Or rather, cut what from me?"

"That's, y-your.....kuu, you mean to make me say it!"

"Hah?"

"Thi-This pervert!"

Large tears formed from Leonora's eyes—

The large sword carved into the ship deck with a loud sound.

Just then, the ship's floor exploded into shards.

".....Wha!?"

Kamito had dodged by a paper-thin margin.

"Aren't you full of the intent to kill me!"

"I won't kill you if you don't resist. Please hold still."

"I'm asking you what you mean—"

And then Kamito realized.

Leonora's gaze was fixed firmly upon Kamito's lower body.

As he noticed her cheeks colored red, she averted her eyes.

"Wait, don't tell me....."

Kamito broke out into a cold sweat.

"Yes, I will have you let me cut off your **that**, Kazehaya Kamito."

Leonora drew the sword back out from the smashed floor and took a stance.

"It would trouble me greatly if you were to use the commotion of the Blade Dance to lay a hand on my subordinates after all."

"Like I would!"

"You can't lie to me, you perverted brute of a demon king!"

She glared at him with cold eyes.

"Perverted brute of a demon king, you say....."

.....It was too horrible.

He didn't think such shameful rumors would reach even outside of the country.

"W-With that devilish power and sweet words, you trick innocent maidens and do this kind of thing and that kind of thing to them, right!"

"What are this kind of thing and that kind of thing....."

"Th-That is.....!"

At Kamito's question, her face burned red.

It seemed that the Dragon Princess was just as pure as the highborn ladies from the academy.

"You know, it's the opposite. You have a huge misunderstanding."

Kamito said this with a sigh.

".....The opposite?"

"Yeah, because I'm always being treated as a slave spirit by Claire."

"Wha? To make a teammate into a toy slave spirit!"

"Listen to what other people are saying for a bit!"

.....Or rather, how come this young lady was using such terminology!?

"Do-Don't come any closer, you pervert!"

"Uoo!"

Leonora's blade sliced the air as she swung down.

Kamito drew Terminus Est and stopped that blow.

The high-pitched wail of metal colliding rang out across the deck.

(.....This is just like a repetition of my first meeting with Ellis!)

While stopping the large blade, Kamito groaned internally.

"I see, you are truly strong....."

Leonora let out a voice of admiration.

"So this is the Demon Slayer that defeated a giant militarized spirit."

"It seems that your information is correct."

"It makes me want to test which is stronger, that or my Dragon Slayer!"

"......!?"

Leonora's sword gave off intense light with her words.

(This is.....!)

It wasn't a regular elemental waffe. It gave off an impression equal to that of Velsaria's Dreadnought.

(—This person's insanely strong!)

As expected, the title of Dracunia's ace wasn't just for show.

"N-Now, please calmly remove your pants, i-it won't hurt a bit."

"Who's gonna do that! Of course it's gonna hurt!"

Kamito pushed back against the large sword.

Such power was being used against him that he couldn't believe it was coming from that girl's frail-looking delicate arms.

It was most likely a spirit magic for strengthening the body's traits. In a straight power competition, Kamito was at a disadvantage.

"Kamito!"

The sound of the air being cut.

Leonora's sword was gripped by the thing that had drawn a bright crimson arc in the air.

"You, what are you doing to my slave spirit!"

It was Claire who ascended to the deck with whip in hand.

With one hand on her hip, she pointed towards Leonora.

"Claire, thanks for the help—"

In the opening Leonora left by diverting her attention, Kamito jumped away.

"You are—"

Leonora, having repelled the Flametounge, glared at Claire.

"Kazehaya Kamito's toy slave spirit."

"Wha!?"

Claire's face instantly reddened.

And with slow movements, she turned towards Kamito.....

"Y-Y-You, don't tell me that's how you see me.....!"

"Wait, you know that's wrong, right? I'm the slave spirit, right?"

.....Wait, that's strange. It seems like she became even angrier.

The two ladies glaring at Kamito made him want to run away—

And at that moment.

Doooooooon!

With an ear-splitting noise, the ship rocked violently.

Part 2

"Kyaaa!"

The floor tilted and Claire lost her balance, falling over .

"—What!?"

Kamito leaned off the side of the ship.

He looked into the flowing clouds below and—

"That is!?"

A giant shadow was present in the clouds.

Like splitting waves, it split the clouds to reveal a gigantic black monster!

"......!?"

Its total length was about 10 meters. Its appearance greatly resembled a stingray swimming in the ocean.

The difference with stingrays was that it had enormous red eyes on its head.

And that it was flying in the sky instead of the ocean.

"A magic beast!?"

"No, that is.....don't tell me, it's from the second aerial unit, the annihilation spirit Death Gaze—"

Leonora Lancaster knit her brows and muttered that while looking with suspicion.

"What?"

"Dracunia's main militarized spirit. It should have been sealed with the end of the Ranbal War, so why is it here?"

"Militarized spirit....."

A spirit which was comparable to a cooperative force of several elementalists.

He didn't know why such a thing would attack the airship but—

The fact that the ship was currently under attack was undeniable.

The military annihilation spirit — Death Gaze roared as it glided.

Even if the ship had a wind barrier, it was not a combat vessel.

If it were to receive an attack from a giant like that, it would be helpless.

The ship's alarm rang out across the deck.

The ship made a quick turn and tried to avoid the spirit.

As expected of a cutting-edge technology ship, it had impressive mobility.

But it was useless in the face of the spirit.

"—It's coming, brace for impact!"

A loud noise.

A fearsome impact rocked the ship and Kamito's body lifted up.

The annihilation spirit had rammed into the side of the ship.

"Fuaa!" "Kyan!"

"You two, grab onto me!"

Kamito quickly covered the two girls that had fallen to the ground. His heart thumped at the softness of their bodies once, but now wasn't the time to think about that.

"Claire, are you okay?"

"Fuaaa, y-you, where are you touching!"

Claire's face was bright red.

"......? Where, you say?"

Kamito looked at the spot he had grabbed both of them.

His hands were caught on to both of their chests.

"......S-sorry!"

Kamito quickly withdrew his hand but,

"Th-th-th-this perverted slave spirit! Cinders, cinders!"

"Hey, stop, this isn't the time for—"

Hit, hit, hit, hit.

Claire hit Kamito with tears in her eyes.

On the other hand, Leonora—

"A-aa-a-a boy, touched my br-brbr-breasts.....!"

Poof. Steam rose from her face and she fainted.

"......H-Hey!"

He shook the fallen girl but it didn't seem like she would wake up.

"It looks like she's in shock from you touching her breasts."

"I-It wasn't on purpose!"

"Hmmm, I wonder about that?"

She glared at Kamito like she was unsatisfied.

.....In any case, he couldn't leave her here.

And just then. The ship rocked violently a second time.

The spirit that had rammed into the ship was also attacking with its tail.

"Kamito, the ship will sink at this rate."

"Yeah....."

At the serious face of Claire, Kamito nodded.

Chaos could be heard below the deck.

Even if they were trained elementalists, they were still regular girls. It was a natural result that a sudden attack would cause panic inside the ship.

The long-range attacker, Rinslet, would also have a hard time reaching the deck quickly in this chaos.

"Looks like we'll have to do this alone."

"Looks that way."

With the last attack, it seemed like the engine had stopped. The ship stalled like it had a nail jammed into it and began falling.

"We have about two or three minutes before we hit the ground....."

Until the staff got the back-up spirit engine working, they had to protect the defenseless ship.

Kamito stood up unsteadily and planted each foot on the gunwale of the deck.

"Est, lend me your power!"

He drew Terminus Est from his waist and poured in divine power.

Responding to Kamito's summons, the sword gave off light.

"Kamito, it's reckless to fight with a sword. I'll do it."

"No, I will. Flametounge won't work on it."

"That is?"

Claire chewed her lip. Claire's battle style of wearing down her opponent was not suited for short-term battles. She knew that best herself.

"But what do I do then. I can't use magic to fly like Ellis."

"As long as I cling to it and don't fall off, isn't that fine?"

"Hah?"

At Kamito's carefree words, Claire was stunned.

"A-Aren't you just stupid!"

"Either way, at this rate the ship will sink. It's worth trying."

"B-But....."

Claire held fast to Kamito's uniform's sleeve.

"What, are you worried about me?"

"Th-That's not it, I'm not worried....."

Claire averted her eyes.

Although arrogant most of the time, she was truly gentle underneath that.

"It's fine. I'll clean it up quickly."

Kamito gave a light knock to Claire's head and—

The flash of a silver white blade disappeared off the side of the ship.

".....Jeez, I don't care anymore, idiot!"

With the wind barrier damaged, the groaning sound of the wind could be heard.

On the back of the annihilation spirit whose head was lodged into the side of the ship—

"Ohhhhhhhhh!"

Kamito impaled it mercilessly.

Piercing through the outer shell, it dug into the underlying flesh.

The annihilation spirit gave off a fearsome cry and began to roll.

On the verge of slipping off, Kamito placed his foot on the outer shell and he gripped his sword with all his might.

In order to smack the bug on its back, the annihilation spirit folded its body and tried to hit it with its tail, rocking the boat in the process.

From the giant flailing about, the ship's armor fell off into the forest.

(The ship won't last at this rate.....)

Gritting his teeth, he withstood the force of the bone crushing attack.

(First I have to take care of that tail!)

Kamito drew out Terminus Est with all his strength. Pulled by gravity, he began to fall. However, just before he did, he jumped as hard as possible.

He ran up the spirit's body rhythmically.

This was just a giant body. If he just observed the muscles for contractions and planned his next step, before he began to fall, he could safely reach another foothold. Though it was a technique which required uncommon ability and battle prowess.

"Sorry. I bear no hatred against you."

Jumping using just the giant's body—

The demon slayer held in both his hands cleaved through the spirit's tail.

The tail convulsed as it fell into the forest below.

However, Kamito's body also became airborne at the same time.

Gravity took over and began to pull him — just before that.

Something wrapped around his ankle and pulled him back up.

He was thrown around in the air — the next moment, he slapped onto the ship's deck.

".....Ouch....."

Kamito was assaulted by pain.

".....Rather, it burns, so would you control your temperature output!?"

The ankle that had the Flametounge around it was a little charred.

"It's punishment for being reckless. If I had messed up, you'd be a pancake right about now."

"I trusted that you wouldn't mess up, master."

".....You're really an idiot, you know that....."

Mumbled the red-faced Claire unintelligibly.

"—And, here it comes!"

With its tail cut off, the enraged annihilation spirit charged towards the ship.

A charge towards the deck with its mouth open, showing off its countless fangs!?

A dreadful shock rattled the ship. Pieces of the deck flew off and scattered.

Kamito took a stance and protected Claire from the shards.

"—As expected of a militarized annihilation spirit, such insane power."

While still onboard the ship deck, the annihilation spirit raged.

It appeared that its head had gotten stuck in the ship.

It was a chance. The ship couldn't take another blow.

Kamito took a stance with his Demon Slayer and charged it with divine power.

"Claire, I'm finishing it here!"

"Got it!"

The annihilation spirit writhed violently.

As it flapped its fin-like wings and attempted to ascend—

"I won't let you!"

Moments before it succeeded, Claire wrapped the Flametounge around it.

The Flametounge didn't manage to pierce the outer shell.

But the flame whip had knocked the spirit off-balance and made it crash back onto the deck.

There—

"Ohhhhhhhhh!"

Kamito ran towards it with a large sword.

A shining blade line.

Kicking off the ground, the sword strike cut into the soft underbelly of the spirit.

However—

"What!?"

Even with its underbelly pierced, the annihilation spirit had not been defeated.

The spirit opened its jaw to reveal many fangs in front of Kamito—

In that moment. He heard a voice from behind.

"O black-fanged dragon spirit, thou, abiding my command, eliminate my enemies—"

"......!?"

"—Destroy, Nidhogg!"

With that dignified voice—

The rough, mad blaze swallowed the enraged giant annihilation spirit.

This time the spirit was burned to charcoal and fell from the ship.

On the deck, there was a line of intense black flame.

"......Claire?"

A black dragon with spread wings stood there.

It was small for a dragon but still stood twice Kamito's height.

"Your finish is weak, Kazehaya Kamito."

Leonora Lancaster stood there beside the black dragon.

He wondered when she had regained consciousness.

"......That is the Knights of the Dragon Emperor's strongest dragon, Nidhogg."

Claire whispered while looking.

(......I see, it really isn't your everyday spirit.)

Kamito was astonished.

(Looks like this time's Blade Dance will have people of this level......)

"......You're a life saver, thanks."

Kamito expressed his thanks and Leonora shook her head.

"That militarized spirit was from Dracunia to begin with so it's only natural that we be the ones to finish it."

"......Even though you were passed out the whole time."

"Th-that's because a man to-touched my chest.....!"

The glaring Claire and panicking Leonora.

The ship shook slightly and then started gaining altitude.

It seems that the back-up spirit engine had been started.

"At least now we can relax."

"But how did a militarized spirit that was supposed to be sealed attack us—"

That spirit was not mad.

It had attacked the ship intentionally.

"It was probably someone who wanted to eliminate the Blade Dance competitors. It's impossible to track who used a militarized spirit."

Leonora analyzed the situation calmly.

"It seems these kinds of attacks are commonplace. It seems that even if we're not there yet, we should treat it as if the Blade Dance has already begun."

While leaning over the side of the ship, Claire pointed at the shadow of the ship.

"Look over there."

"Yeah?"

Kamito took a peek and saw a battleship within the clouds retreating.

"I don't know whose ship it is, but there's no way it's not connected to that attack. To use a militarized spirit of that class, there must be several elementalists onboard that ship."

"Are we not going to chase them?"

"Without a flying wind spirit, it's impossible to catch up to a battleship going at full speed. And they probably have more militarized spirits. It's too dangerous."

"......Sealed militarized spirits, huh."

Something was tugging at the edge of Kamito's mind.

He remembered the battle with Jio Inzagi and his mission at the mine.

(Restia was trying to unseal the strategic-class militarized spirit Jormungandr.)

As expected, he might just be thinking too much into it —

"This might be connected to that darkness spirit girl from the other militarized spirit case....."

But it seemed that Claire had the same idea.

She peered at Kamito with a meek face.

"....."

Kamito stayed silent.

"Kamito, are you unhurt!?"

"All of a sudden, the ship shook.....what happened out here!?"

"Kamito-kun, are you okay?"

Ellis, Rinslet and Fianna all came up to the deck.

"Kazehaya Kamito, I will retire for today but—"

And Leonora reverted her black dragon to its sword form and turned on her heel.

"Deceiving princess maidens and forming a heavenly harem — that Wish is something this blade will never allow."

"Wait, I'm not wishing for that kind of thing!"

"Y-You, are you participating in the Blade Dance for that kind of wish?"

Gogogogogogogogo.....!

"Claire, don't believe it!"

"A heavenly harem.....was it?"

"Kamito-san, what does that mean!"

"Umm, what rank am I?"

"You guys....."

.....After that, Kamito was questioned by the young ladies for about an hour.

Part 3

"Nii-sama, why have you become that weak?"

On the deck of the small battleship—

The girl with ash grey hair tilted her head in a strange manner.

Underfoot were the shattered remains of a ring.

It was the ring of the sealed annihilation spirit.

"Muir, you should have been told not to use the Jester's Vise."

From the ship's hatch appeared another girl.

A girl with brown skin that looked to be around 15 years old.

Beautiful jade hair. Pure red pupils and pointed ears.

She was a sub-human Elfim with all the traits of one.

"It's not Muir's fault. It's the fault of those military guys for having a weak spirit."

"The mission this time is just to test his power. Just because you wanted to, a precious spirit was lost."

"If it couldn't stand Muir's Jester's Vise, it wasn't fit to be used."

"Militarized spirits aren't your toys. They're not something you just throw away."

"Hmph, and that's why Lily is weak."

Muir pouted her cheeks in discontent.

The Elfim girl — Lily Flame breathed a heavy sigh.

"Well, fine, so how was his power? We lost a precious militarized spirit. You better at least have that or you'll have no excuse for Cardinal."

"Nii-sama has become weak."

Muir put her index finger to her lips and shook her head in disappointment.

"......Weak? Even though he defeated a mid-class militarized spirit?"

"The past nii-sama would have done it alone. But this time, the group with nii-sama pulled him down."

"His teammates from Areishia Academy, huh. I really can't believe it.....that he's hanging out with that half-baked group."

"Like this, nii-sama will just become weaker."

"......That's true. Eventually a hindrance to Cardinal's plan may appear."

Lily muttered this—

"It's fine. Muir will just kill everyone."

Muir smiled innocently and turned towards her.

"Muir, don't do willful things. We are the Cardinal's tools?"

"Shut up, Lily."

"......!?"

For an instant a shudder ran through Lily Flame's body.

The number two of the Instructional School — " Monster" Muir Alenstarl.

She must never be upset.

Lily had accompanied her for a long time so she knew that well.

"Muir doesn't care about anything other than nii-sama. I'll kill you too if you get in my way, Lily."

"Muir....."

A few breathless seconds.

And then—

"Aha, I'm joking. Lily, what kind of face are you making?"

Muir made a pure smile and turned towards her.

"Lily is my precious friend so I won't just kill you that easily."

"....."

Muir looked towards the far end of the ship and sighed.

"Wait for me, nii-sama. I'll erase the meddlesome onee-chans for you."

Chapter 4: Floating Island

Part 1

A few hours after the annihilation spirit's attack.

The Belphal-class flying ship, repaired by the engineering team, landed in the sacred land of the Wind Elemental Lord.

"Ah, I can see the island!"

On the deck, Rinslet seemed to be in a good mood and pointed at the island.

The pure and high-spirited figure of this young highborn lady was cute.

"Do-Don't say it so loudly. It's embarrassing."

Claire whispered that in a small voice while poking Rinslet's elbow.

"Oh my, to want me to be quiet, are you jealous?"

"You give off a bad impression is what I'm saying."

Kamito watched over them with sidelong glances while he got to the side of the ship.

"So that's the sacred land....."

Between the thick clouds and surrounded by a steep mountain range was a floating island.

Ragna Ys – even within Astral Zero, it was one of the most important of the sacred lands.

"Restia is there....."

Kamito gripped his leather gloved left hand.

The flying ship quietly advanced towards the floating island's port.

Part 2

Past noon. A little after the appointed time, the flying ship docked at Grand Ys' harbor.

Upon seeing the battered condition of the flying ship, all the ship mechanics held their heads.

They transferred at the port into the Divine Ritual Institute's prepared horse-drawn carriages.

Because horse-drawn carriages were meant for four people, it was a little tight with six. Est went as a sword but that only freed up one space.

During the horse-drawn carriage's bumpy ride, he had felt Rinslet's breasts. Kamito quickly separated himself from her but it was really tight.

"Ka-Kamito-san.....you're perverted."

"S-Sorry, it was unavoidable."

"Well, I understand that but....."

Rinslet sulked.

But there was no reproachful look in that face.

By the way, on the opposite side, Claire–

".....Whatever, anyway, my breasts won't shake....."

For some reason, she was muttering to herself with teary eyes.

The horse-drawn carriage continued to the opening ceremony's castle.

While pointing at various things outside the window, Claire acted as a guide.

"The floating island Ragna Ys is one of the five sacred lands, the sacred land of the Wind Elemental Lord. The Blade Dance was held here 74 years ago."

By the way, the Blade Dance three years ago had been held in the Fire Elemental Lord's territory at Fire Mountain city. There was no rule as to where the Blade Dance would be held as it was decided by oracles received by the Queens.

"And the castle in the center is a historic ruin from a mystical age."

"So that's where we're lodging, huh?"

"Yes, it is an unequaled opportunity. Normally the Divine Ritual Institute would never allow anyone except

princess maidens to enter. Which reminds me, have you been there before, Fianna?"

"Yes, but just once. I normally remained at the Fire Elemental Lord's shrine."

"......The Elemental Lord's true shrine. I'm a little nervous."

Ellis whispered that with a nervous expression.

There were no signs of people on the paved road.

The ones invited to the opening ceremony were the Five Great Elemental Lords and the Queens that serve them, the elementalist representatives and the uppercrust nobility only. The entrance of others was not permitted and could provoke the beginning of a real war.

"Are the king and queen of the Empire not coming?"

"......It seems. But that doesn't concern me."

Fianna shrugged and Kamito–

"......S-Sorry."

Fianna had been named the “Lost Queen” after she lost her spirit contracting powers despite being a Queen candidate and consequently was shunned by the king and queen.

Speaking about the king and queen to her may have been insensitive of him.

"I don't mind. To begin with, our relationship wasn't that good and not returning to the Divine Ritual Institute almost got me disowned. I have no intention of clinging to my title as the second princess and even if I'm removed from the monarchy line–"

And then Fianna stopped talking.

Claire's parents had been imprisoned and she was chasing her rebel sister who had disappeared.

"I don't mind."

Claire flicked her red twintails up and turned to Rinslet.

"Is anybody coming from Rinslet or Ellis' households to watch?"

"Yes. My father and younger sister will be coming."

"One of the Blade Dance's objective is to gather superior talent. The Fahrengart family traditionally adopts those excelling in martial ability."

Rinslet and Ellis nodded at the same time. Come to think of it, Ellis' step-sister, Velsaria Eva, was adopted, thought Kamito.

"Th-That's why, that is, if you display your true power before them, they might be wi-willing to accept you as an adopted child....."

"....."

For some reason, Ellis was muttering unintelligibly with a red face.

"Will Kamito's family be coming?"

"Eh?"

At Claire's words–

Kamito asked without thinking.

"......My family?"

With the way the conversation was going, it was obvious that he would be asked that.

But Kamito suddenly couldn't manage to reply.

Family – the one word Kamito was most separate from .

"You, you really don't talk about your family. I think I heard your parents were from the empire?"

"Y-Yeah....."

He nodded with ambiguity. In the academy application that Greyworth had prepared, Kamito was the adopted son of a lower-class family of nobles. Claire had believed that.

Of course, that family of nobles didn't really exist. It was just a family created on paper.

Kamito had no known family name. Any vague memories he had of his parents when he was young had been overwritten with the experiences at the Instructional School.

The one who had been by the young Kamito's side was the darkness spirit – only Restia.

Possibly–

(I wonder if I could call them family.....)

Kamito recalled the other girls at the facility.

The other two girls in his tactical team at the Instructional School.

They didn't know each others' real names and it wasn't a relationship between comrades.

The expert intelligence elementalist, Lily Flame.

And that girl that was attached to him and called him nii-sama.

(.....The militarized spirit elementalist, Muir Alenstarl.)

Four years ago. Ever since the facility had been destroyed in the flame spirit's attack, Kamito had lost track of where she was. He had heard the greater half of the orphans there were taken in for protection by the

Empire, but there were sure to be others like Jio Inzagi who had used the chaos of the institution's destruction to escape.

He wondered if his remembering them was because of that dream he had–

"……? What's wrong, to make you have such a grim face?"

"Nothing, just thinking about the past."

Kamito averted his eyes from the inquiring Claire and looked out the window.

They were approaching the castle on the mountain.

Part 3

The horse-drawn carriage stopped before a large gate made of stone.

The castle at the top of the slightly inclined mountain was prepared with unparalleled beauty and grandeur.

It was surrounded by a forest and had a lake a short distance away.

Other teams also arrived and stopped their horse-drawn carriages before the gate.

(.....It's a good thing we haven't run into that Dragon Princess.)

Relieved, he descended from the horse-drawn carriage and,

"We have been awaiting your arrival, princess maidens who have come to entertain the Elemental Lords."

Inside the gate, a group of girls in priestess garb greeted them.

"They are the apprentices of the Divine Ritual Institute. My juniors."

Fianna whispered into his ear.

"While you are staying here, we will be in your care for instruction in femininity."

When the princess maidens bowed, Kamito stole a glance of their bare breasts underneath the garment and his heart throbbed.

Looking closely, the ceremonial garments they were wearing were equivalent to being half-naked.

The opening above the breasts was large and at the hem of skirts, a slight amount of youthful skin was peeking out.

Even though the clothes were to inspire purity, they were strangely erotic.

Maybe if Claire and the others wore those clothes..... he suddenly thought of that.

"Hm? Kamito, what are you looking at?"

He was asked that by Claire–

"Ahh, I was just thinking that if you guys wore those clothes, it'd really suit you–"

"Wha!?"

.....Kamito said his thoughts out loud without thinking .

(.....Uwa, I messed up!)

"Wh-wh-wh-what are you sa-sa-sa-saying, you perverted slave spirit!"

Claire's face flared red and she beat her whip against the ground.

"Ka-Kamito-san likes those kinds of things, it seems....."

"Wh-What do you think the sacred garments are!"

"I wonder if I still have my sacred garments from when I was in the Divine Ritual Institute?"

The three young ladies whispered amongst themselves.

"So, Kamito-sama, whose figure did you imagine?"

"....!?"

The smiling Carol asked and Kamito averted his eyes.

Part 4

Entering the castle, they arrived at a large entry hall.

Beautiful arches with a high ceiling. A carpet was spread on the ground through a pillared corridor up to a door that led further in.

The lighting was provided not by lamps or spirit stones, but by small floating light spirits.

Even if it was called a relic of the mythical age, several thousand years of repeated reconstruction and remodeling had left few traces of things from that time long ago. The sole remaining traces were sculptures hidden by stone pillars.

Along the pillared corridor's walls were colorful illustrations. These were at best the remnants of a few hundred years and the motifs were Queens that had left their name in history as well as Blade Dance winners.

"Hm?"

Kamito stopped before a large set of pictures.

Depicted there was the winner of the Blade Dance from three years ago.

The strongest blade dancer – Ren Ashbell.

Wrapped in the strange garments of a foreign country, with an ominous demonic blade of darkness in her left hand.

That blade in her left hand was the darkness spirit, Restia's elemental waffe, Vorpal Sword.

Bewitching black hair. Pearly white cheeks.

That girl's profile, drawn with a delicate touch, viewed as a goal, was very beautiful.

"......This is overdone. The work of a painter without a discerning eye."

Kamito muttered that and Ellis who had walked around turned towards him.

"It's you who lacks appreciation. Her beauty wasn't like that."

"That's right. Even though we're the same gender, she made my heart throb."

Claire also nodded in agreement.

"Ah–, I see....."

Kamito made a sour expression and groaned.

"Fufu, aren't you glad, Kamito-kun."

"You....."

Fianna teasingly laughed and looked at Kamito through half-opened eyes.

Following the princess maidens through the large castle, they finally arrived at their rooms.

"Empire representatives Team Scarlet, your room is over here. If you would like to eat, use something or anything else, please do not hesitate to do so."

"Wait a second, am I in the same room?"

Kamito quickly asked the princess maiden and,

"Th-th-th-there's no way, what are you thinking!"

Claire refuted it with a panicked expression.

"Y-Yeah, as expected, staying in the same room as a gentleman is difficult."

Said Ellis as she cleared her throat.

"That's right, as expected.....right."

"B-But, it can't be helped if there are no open rooms, right?"

Fianna and Rinslet also exchanged nervous glances.

"......? Of course, we have prepared a separate room for the gentleman."

To the guiding princess maiden's words,

"Th-That's right, of course!"

"Y-Yes, it is an obvious requirement!"

The young ladies said in high-pitched voices.

"Fufu, that's a pity."

"Like that would happen. Having just a lone male in a room of girls, what kind of torture is that?"

Kamito said that to the laughing and smiling Carol with half-opened eyes.

"Then, I'll be going straight to bed. See you later."

"Kamito, wait a moment."

His collar was grabbed as he turned to head for his room.

"What?"

"We are going to purify ourselves now."

"Purify?"

Purification meant the act of washing one's body with water in a purifying ceremony. Maidens that were not pure could not use spirits. For that reason, elementalists had to constantly maintain a pure mind and body.

"That's why, that is.....y-you get changed and come to the lake as well!"

"Nah, I'm fine. I'll do it alone later."

Kamito shook his head in a troubled manner.

"Or rather, you don't want me to see you in swimsuits, right?"

"Th-That is....."

Claire's cheeks flushed and she averted her gaze,

"No, not really, i-it's not that I don't want it.....it's fine if it's Kamito."

"....?"

"N-Nothing!"

Unfortunately, Claire's voice had been too quiet and he couldn't hear it well.

.....He wondered what that was. Recently, Claire had become rather inarticulate.

"A-Anyway, we're a team so we'll be doing the purification together as well!"

This was a command to her slave spirit – Claire said this as her red twintails stood on end.

"Th-That's right, breaking the team's unity isn't good!"

"Kamito-san doesn't have enough self-recognition as part of a team!"

"Being able to do the purification ceremony together is a sign of trust!"

The three young ladies all agreed with each other.

"No, you guys are exaggerating....."

.....He wondered why they were fussing over the purification so much.

The maid Carol cleared her throat with furrowed brows.

"To be clear, the ladies simply want to show Kamito their new swimsuits–"

""""""Carol!""""""

The collective voice of the young ladies.

"What is it, exactly....."

Kamito felt troubled–

A tug.

His cuff was being pulled.

"......Est?"

Est, who had returned to human form at some point, looked up at Kamito.

"Kamito, I want to play with Kamito at the lake."

"....."

Being looked at by Est's mysterious pupils, Kamito gulped.

(I did something bad to Est this morning so.....)

It seemed like Est wasn't mad anymore but–

He felt that he had to do something to compensate her.

Kamito placed his hand on Est's head and caressed it.

"Got it. Let's play at the lake together."

"Yes, Kamito. I'm happy."

Est nodded expressionlessly.

Kamito turned towards Est and the others.

"With that, I'll also be doing the purification – hey, Owaa!"

""""""Why are you so soft on Est!""""""

Four people's luggage flew to his face.

.....It seems like we have no problems with teamwork.

Part 5

"–Here is Kamito-sama's room."

Kamito was led down the hallway to a gloomy room the furthest in.

The room was putrid and had a gloomy air to it. In the corner were paintings and sculptures as well as other junk covered in spiderwebs.

".....Is it just me or am I the only one being treated this badly?"

.....In Claire and the others' room, there had even been a fireplace and chandelier.

Rather than a room, this was closer to a storage room.

"The Divine Ritual Institute decided this."

The princess maiden cleared her throat.

.....It seemed like she was being openly cold towards Kamito.

(.....Well, it can't be helped, I guess.)

The Divine Ritual Institute was, like the academy, far removed from the presence of men.

"Does this room not have a light?"

"Yes. Light spirits wouldn't come near this kind of gloomy room."

"I'll open the window."

"As you wish. However, it may be rusted shut."

"....."

Kamito sighed deeply and entered the box-like room.

He had left Est at the girls' room so he had to clean the room by himself.

(.....Now that I think about it, it's about time to eat.)

Other than the black tea he drank on the flying ship, he had not eaten anything since that morning.

"Sorry, could I request something light to eat?"

"Kamito-sama wishes for nyotaimori? [3] I apologize but that–"

"I didn't say that! Just something normal like a sandwich!"

"A nyotai-sandwich.....wrapping yourself with breasts .....?"

".....I'm begging you, please stop with the nyotai stuff."

Kamito sighed deeply at the scornful glare he received from the princess maiden.

Part 6

"This kind of bold swimsuit.....is it okay?"

"The knight captain's breasts are unexpectedly quite large....."

"Ahn – what are you doing!"

Ellis gave a cute cry at Rinslet fondling her breasts.

In the girls' room, the young ladies were changing into swimsuits from their uniforms.

Smooth, young skin. Bewitching body lines.

They were beautiful girls of equally outstanding proportions.

In the corner was Claire who felt that she had lost.

(.....Wh-What, it's not just me!)

.....The slightly present chest.

With a pink tip, it was like a budding flower.

(Even though everybody else is growing properly.....)

She sighed as she watched the rest of the team getting changed.

The only one it felt like she could win against was Est, but she was a spirit.

(Even Kamito wouldn't like this kind of small chest.....)

While lightly rubbing the slight bumps–

What appeared in Claire's mind was a scene from two months prior.

The time when she had first met Kamito at the lake in the Spirit Forest.

The words he had said when he had seen her bathing naked.

–I have no interest towards a kid's body, he had said.

"......!"

Remembering it, her cheeks flushed red.

Having a guy her age see her naked, that was of course her first time.

(.....But thinking about it, it was only two months ago.)

Standing on one foot and slipping on her new swimsuit, Claire sighed.

Only two months.

But ever since she had met Kamito, many things have happened.

The showdown with Ellis at the academy. Fighting the rampaging militarized spirit.

The cooking battle with the newly transferred Fianna. The mission at the mine.

Two weeks ago, they defeated the strongest elementalist and gathered five teammates to participate in the Blade Dance.

–Until she met Kamito, she was always alone.

(But I still don't really know anything about Kamito.....)

Dropping her panties onto the floor, she sank deep into thought.

Even when she had asked about his family on the horse-drawn carriage, he had avoided the question.

(It's not like I want to pry but–)

The thing she still didn't know about Kamito was his connection with that darkness spirit girl.

She had given Claire the frenzied spirit and had been at the mine with Jio Inzagi for the purpose of unsealing the strategic-class militarized spirit Jormungandr.

She was Kamito's contracted spirit but nothing else was known.

Whenever a discussion about the past arose, Kamito would stay silent.

.....She didn't like that.

(At least tell your master, idiot.....)

While hiding her small chest with her hands, Claire pressed her lips together, displeased.

Chapter 5: Water Play

Part 1

The sun beamed down gently into the forest.

The rich colors flitting about in the air.

Colorful fruits adorned the branches of the densely growing trees.

It was the lake beside the castle.

Because of the spirits floating near the lake shore, this lake granted high purity. It was a place of the highest quality for a princess maiden's purification.

"Claire and the others aren't here yet....."

Kamito, who had just arrived, surveyed the area.

His top half was naked. On his bottom half, he wore trunks. Of course, he had removed the leather glove on his left hand, but he wrapped the seal underneath with a black cloth.

"Being the first one here makes it look like I'm really excited and that's embarrassing."

While scratching his head, he complained and–

"Kamito-kun, sorry to keep you waiting!"

"Owaa!?"

Squish.

Being suddenly hugged from behind, Kamito unconsciously yelped.

"Fianna!?"

Surprised, he turned around–

And there stood the cute princess wearing a bold black swimsuit.

"Does it suit me?"

"......!?"

Fianna's swimsuit was an adult-like bikini. Wrapped around her supple hips was a low-leg pantie. A black

ribbon adorned her chest. The frills wrapped around her thighs coupled with the garter looked erotic. The triangular cloth covering her breasts was very suggestive and seemed about to spill over.

"A queen shouldn't be that immodest!"

"Fufu, Kamito-kun got angry ♪"

Fianna stuck out her tongue in a cute manner and released his arm.

"Y-You....."

Kamito's heart throbbed at those enchanting words.

"That's right. Kamito-kun, should I show you my spirit seal?"

"Wha–"

Fianna bent over and–

Allowed him to gaze at her breasts within the gap of her bold swimsuit.

Kamito swallowed hard.

"Look, it's right here. On the inside....."

While teasing him with her bold actions, her face was lightly tinted red.

Despite wearing a mature swimsuit, she was still a pure young lady.

The soft cleavage that, even now, urged him to bury his face in it.

Just as he glanced the spirit seal carved within–

"Fianna-san, wh-what are you doing!"

From the small path within the forest ran the swimsuit-clad Rinslet.

It was a proper-looking swimsuit suited to a well-bred young lady, but it emphasized her breasts' volume. The legs peeking out from under her pareo were so beautiful that Kamito froze in fascination.

"Ka-Kamito-san, how is my swimsuit?"

".....Y-Yeah, it really suits you."

Kamito spoke his true thoughts and Rinslet blushed.

"Y-You really.....think so? I-I don't like being flattered.
"

"It's not flattery. You're really, um.....beautiful."

".....Auu....."

Rinslet reddened right up to her ears.

And fell over just like that.

"S-Sorry for making you wait!"

And now came a rigid voice.

The one who emerged from the same path as Rinslet was the knight captain, Ellis.

She was wearing a sporty navy blue swimsuit with a stress on practicality. It was plain compared to Fianna and Rinslet's, but the gap between her armored state and the current one emphasizing her body line was dangerous.

He was rooted to the spot.

"Ka-Kamito, don't look here, look over there!"

"S-Sorry.....!"

Kamito quickly averted his gaze and—

Ellis cleared her throat.

".....N-No, I mean it's fine to look?"

"Which one is it....."

"Sh-Shut up! Besides, you probably just thought it's a boring swimsuit!"

"Nobody said that."

Kamito tiredly sighed.

".....I should've worn a more erotic swimsuit."

"Hmm?"

It felt like the knight captain had just said something amazing but–

"Ellis looks very beautiful in her swimsuit."

"Eh?"

Exclaimed Ellis, her amber eyes widening.

"I thought it suited the serious Ellis."

"Kamito....."

Ellis tightened her arm to her chest and blushed.

"The only ones left are Claire and Est–"

Kamito muttered and,

"Ka-Kamito....."

"Claire?"

At the voice he'd grown accustomed to, he turned around – Claire stood there.

.....No.

From behind a large tree, twintails were poking out.

"You, what are you doing?"

"....."

Claire stayed hidden behind the tree.

"Did your swimsuit's string get cut by any chance?"

"Th-That's not it!"

The twintails stood on end.

"Then why aren't you coming out?"

"B-Because it's.....embarrassing."

"Embarrassing, you say.....everybody's also in a swimsuit."

"That's true but.....o-okay."

Claire resigned herself and timidly came out.

At that moment–

Kamito's breath stopped.

Claire was wearing a pure red bikini. Though it was a plain and simple design, it actually accentuated her beauty. The panties held with string wrapped the smooth skin and her thighs had a thin line from her leather whip.

It was painful to admit, but she was insanely cute.

Honestly, he didn't understand why she was embarrassed.

"You....."

"D-Don't say anything, since I'm just....."

When he saw her timidly hiding her chest with both hands–

Kamito realized the reason.

Claire was concerned about her small breasts.

"....Jeez."

Kamito made a wry smile and placed his hand on the embarrassed Claire's head.

"Fuaa!"

"Listen, okay? These are my true thoughts. I won't say it again."

"Wh-What is it.....!"

"You're cute, Claire."

"Fuaaa, i-idiot, what are you saying!"

Hit, hit, hit.

Claire hit his shoulder with a beet-red face.

Part 2

"This time the knight captain is the demon!"

"I won't lose in swimming."

"Ellis, you can't use your wind armor."

The lovely voices echoing within the forest. Glistening water droplets.

Breasts that shook in tango with the rest of the body met the eyes.

The swimsuit-clad beauties frolicked in the lake.

.....No matter how you look at it, there's no feeling of this being a purification ceremony.

Rinslet Laurenfrost
リンスレット・ローレンフロスト

Fianna Ray Ordesia
フィアナ・レイ・オルデシア

Ellis Fahrengart
エリス・ファーレンガルト

Claire Rouge
クレア・ルージュ

(Well, it's important to relax as well.....)

Kamito stretched out on the lake shore.

He couldn't play with the girls because he'd be constantly distracted, so he took to sunbathing. The girls seemed dissatisfied, but perhaps because they had heavy-handedly forced him to come, they let him go.

Beside him, Est was kneeling while licking a popsicle.

Her snow fairy-like body was covered by a navy blue academy-issued swimsuit.

Her smooth milky skin and smooth silvery white hair.

On both of her legs were knee-high socks.

Est had the sort of appearance that maniacs would like , wearing both a swimsuit and knee-high socks.

There wasn't much skin showing, but for some reason, it felt like it crossed even more lines than being fully nude.

"Est, you're not going to play with everyone?"

"It would be embarrassing to be barefooted."

Est replied expressionlessly.

"Besides, I can't swim."

"Ahh, I see....."

Est was a sword spirit so she couldn't float.

No matter how strong of a spirit she was, she couldn't cast off her basic metal attribute.

(.....Come to think of it, it was also near a lake that I made the contract with Est.)

While gazing at Est's side profile, Kamito thought that.

Demon Slayer – Terminus Est.

A legendary sealed holy sword spirit. It was a mystery why a sword of her caliber had chosen Kamito.

–He still had no idea.

Besides, Est had many other secrets as well.

"Hey, Est–"

"?"

Est turned towards him while licking the popsicle.

"Are you really the holy sword that defeated the Demon King?"

The legend of the Demon Slayer remained everywhere on the continent.

Est was undoubtedly an unrivaled sword, but there was no way she was the real one – that's what he thought .

(But if she really is.....)

The power that had destroyed the Cursed Armament Seal on Velsaria's heart two weeks ago.

That was not the ability of a regular sword spirit.

In the legend of the Demon Slayer, the holy sword was also said to have destroyed the spirit seals for all seventy-two of the Demon King's contracts.

"I'm sorry, Kamito."

But Est silently shook her head.

"My memories are incomplete right now. If I regained my true body, my memories should return with my full power."

"No, I should be the one to apologize. Sorry."

Because Kamito clung to his contract with Restia, the contract with Est remained incomplete. Est could not display her true power.

"No, Kamito."

Est brought the popsicle away from her lips and gazed at Kamito with her mysterious eyes.

And then–

"I'm glad I contracted with you."

"......Est?"

For a moment, the fleeting expression on Est's face made his heart race.

"–Kamito-san."

"Owaa!"

Platinum blonde hair sparkled in the sunlight.

At some point in time, the swimsuit-clad Rinslet had stood beside him.

"Don't surprise me like that....."

"No, that is, sorry....."

Kamito apologized to the pouting Rinslet.

"What's wrong, Rinslet, you're not going to swim with everyone else?"

At his words, Rinslet squirmed a bit and her face reddened.

"I c-can't, that is.....I can't swim very well."

"Is that so?"

That was unexpected. That the perfect Rinslet would have that kind of weak point.

"Hmm? Even though you were playing tag in the water normally just now?"

"Th-That was.....umm, it was a little trick."

"Trick?"

Rinslet nodded timidly and stuck out her finger.

A freezing atmosphere gathered and from thin air appeared a white wolf.

The demon ice spirit Fenrir.

"I was riding on this child's back while in the water."

".....I see."

Upon imagining the white wolf elegantly running around under the water surface with all its might, Kamito wryly smiled.

"Y-You just laughed, didn't you! That's horrible!"

"S-Sorry....."

"And so, umm....."

And Rinslet's cheeks became even redder.

"I'd like to ask a favor of you, Kamito-san."

"A favor?"

"Umm, that is, my....."

And then Rinslet became inarticulate.

(.....What?)

It was at times like these that her maid would translate for him–

Kamito looked around and found the hiding figure of Carol.

.....He had been thinking for a while now that he hadn't seen her, but she was hiding this entire time.

She was moving her lips and appeared to be saying something–

Kamito used the lip-reading ability he had been trained in at the institute.

(Milady, do your best – was it.....what did that mean?)

Waiting for a little while like that–

"Ka-Kamito-san!"

Rinslet yelled out and seemed to have found her resolve.

Sweeping her platinum blonde hair up and pointing at Kamito–

"I-I shall allow you to teach me how to swim!"

.....I see, thought Kamito with a wry smile.

(.....As always, she's a lady that just can't be honest.)

But if you got used to it, those points about her also became cute.

"Est, I'm going to swim with Rinslet for a bit."

"Yes, Kamito....."

Est pouted a little sadly.

Part 3

"Ka-Kamito-san, please don't let go....."

"Yeah, it's fine. Spread out your body more."

Splash. The sound of water echoed near the shore.

A little bit away from where everyone was playing, in the shadow of a rock, Kamito was teaching Rinslet how to swim.

It seemed she didn't want the others to know.

"F-for sure, okay.....i-if you let go, I'll make you into an ice sculpture!"

With a nervous expression, Rinslet gripped onto Kamito's arms.

With the soft sensation upon his skin, his heart throbbed.

"I-I got it, so please don't force your nails into me."

"S-Sorry about that....."

Taking her hands off his arms, she instead grabbed his hands.

She held tightly with her slender and soft fingers.

"A gentleman's.....hand."

With red cheeks, her upturned eyes were wavering.

"Well, I am always holding a sword....."

Kamito said while quickly averting his eyes.

(Th-This angle is bad.....!)

From the white nape to the collarbone adorned with water droplets.

The breasts that could be seen under the water surface were much too distracting.

"Kamito-san, where are you looking?"

"Ah, no.....come on, loosen up and stretch out."

Kamito immediately changed the topic.

"T-To have a boy give me an order.....that's the first time."

Rinslet shut her mouth tightly.

But that expression looked somewhat happy.

"Sorry, milady. I'm just an impertinent fellow."

"No, i-it's fine if you give more orders. B-But perverted orders are a little....."

"Hmm?"

"N-Nothing!"

Rinslet spoke into the water and formed bubbles.

What a strange person – Kamito thought that and then.

"......?"

Kamito felt someone watching him.

He felt a blade-like pressure on the back of his neck.

Kamito quickly surveyed the area.

He only felt the presence for an instant and it had already disappeared.

(I don't think it was my imagination but.....)

It might just have been the spirits around the lake.

Well, it had disappeared quickly so there was no point worrying about it.

"What's wrong?"

"No, it's nothing.....come on, relax more."

".....L-Like this?"

Rinslet nodded honestly and stretched out her entire body.

Her cute butt wrapped in the white swimsuit rose out of the water.

"I-I floated!"

Her smile was like a blooming rose, very bewitching.

"Rinslet really becomes cute when she's honest."

With a wry smile, Kamito whispered that and Rinslet became red to her ears.

"......Kamito-san, you're teasing me, aren't you?"

Bite. Like she was scolding him, she bit onto both of his arms.

Bite. Bite.

"Rinslet, it hurts....."

"Fufu, it's punishment for teasing me."

Rinslet smiled elegantly and finally stopped biting him .

But as expected of a talented lady, her learning rate was really fast.

"Then, next, try moving your feet."

"Y-Yes....."

Rinslet nodded and–

"Kyan!"

Suddenly gave out a cute yelp.

"W-What happened?"

"Fua, ya, ahn.....w-where are you touching!"

Rinslet flopped around in the water.

"N-No, at this kind of place.....Kamito-san.....you're perverted."

".....Wa-Wait, I'm not doing anything!"

Kamito denied with all his heart and–

Gogogogogogo.....!

The water surface that had been calm until just now boiled.

"That seems like fun, Kamito."

"Claire!?"

What rose from the water was Claire with her twintails standing on end.

Her tone was calm but.....she was angry. No mistake.

"Y-Y-You, what are you doing alone with Rinslet?"

"No, this is just swimming training–"

At his answer – Kamito hurriedly shut himself up.

Rinslet had wanted him to not reveal that she couldn't swim.

He couldn't betray her trust.

Kamito suddenly became quiet, and it seemed that that incited Claire.

"Could it be that you were doing s-something that you can't tell me....."

Gogogogogogo.....!

"Th-That's wrong, Claire, this is–"

What came to Kamito at that time was–

"That is.....it was a secret lesson!"

Those words.

".....Secret lesson!?"

Claire's eyebrows shot up.

.....Crap, it seemed that he had messed up his word selection.

"Th-That's right, it was a lesson about things that can't be said!"

While still holding onto Kamito's arm, Rinslet said that .

"A-A lesson about things that can't be said....."

"Wait, Rinslet, that wording will invite misunderstandings–"

But Claire had already turned red from whatever she had imagined.

".....Kamito, th-this pervert, how lewd!"

Hit, hit, hit.

"Calm down, you're wrong! It wasn't a lesson like you're imagining!"

"Claire, could you please not interrupt our secret lesson?"

Rinslet said with a composed smile.

"......Y-You, get away from Kamito!"

"Oh my, why should I?"

Sparks flew between the hell cat girl and the ice princess.

.....The usual fight had begun.

"Ka-Kamito is my slave spirit and I won't give him to you!"

"No, Kamito-san is mine!"

Both of them each grabbed one of his cheeks.

.....A fight between two top-class elementalists started.

While sending water droplets flying, both of them grappled with each other's swimsuits.

Rinslet was always standing normally. This was the sandbar, so there was a foothold.

The breasts and butt that could be seen from the offset swimsuit made Kamito turn red.

"G-Give up already!"

Rinslet placed a hand on Claire's breast and pulled at her swimsuit.

And then.

The string of the red bikini came undone–

"......!?"

Time stopped.

Claire quickly covered her breasts with her hands, but it was too late.

The figure of those small, cute hidden mounds was burned into Kamito's vision.

"......D-Did you see?"

Kamito nodded truthfully.

"A, uu....."

Claire flushed red up to her ears–

"......Fuaaaaan!?"

"Claire!"

And bolted into the forest.

"Jeez....."

"I-I wonder if I did something bad....."

Rinslet was reflecting.

The forest that spread around the lake.

Even if it was the Elemental Lord's sacred land, there could be dangerous spirits in the forest.

He knew Claire was a top-class elementalist – but as expected, he was still worried.

Kamito sighed and chased after Claire who had disappeared into the forest.

Part 4

While running in the dark forest–

(Ka-Kamito saw my breasts.....!)

Claire reddened.

It was embarrassing to the point that her face felt like it would burst into flames.

(Jeez, what is this, what is this, idiot!)

He had seen her naked in their first meeting.

But then and now were totally different.

She didn't know why though.....

(Wh-Why is my heart.....beating this fast, I wonder.)

Claire stopped running and suppressed her beating heart.

That's right, she didn't hate that he had seen her naked .

Having him see her underdeveloped breasts had been a shock.

(Th-This small of a chest is strange, isn't it.....)

Rub. Rub.

While feeling her soft chest, she bit her lip.

Claire had read it in a book.

That boys liked girls with big breasts.

That definitely did not exclude Kamito–

After all, Kamito had been all happy around that big-breasted Rinslet.

(Wh-wh-wh-what's this secret lesson about things that can't be said, y-you idiot!)

Remembering it again, she felt her anger resurge.

Just what were those two doing in the shadow of that rock–

"I-I d-don't really care about who he gets along with....."

–Just as she said that with a pout.

She felt a cold sensation on the back of her neck.

"......Who is it!?"

Turning around, she inquired with a sharp voice.

And.

"Hmm, you're unexpectedly sharp, onee-chan. But separating from the group isn't good."

Appearing from the trees like a shadow–

A single hooded girl.

Slightly visible ash grey hair. Transparent blue pupils.

A young girl that was even smaller than the short Claire.

(–A child in this place?)

Claire was suspicious.

She didn't appear to be a princess maiden of the Divine Ritual Institute.

The only possibility was that she was a member of another team.

"Do you have some business with me?"

Claire asked while keeping her guard up.

What she had felt just before was close to killing intent .

Even if her opponent was a small girl, she couldn't be careless.

The girl laughed lightly.

"I'll have you disappear, onee-chan. For nii-sama's sake ."

"......!?"

Instantly, Claire reacted.

Water came from the ground as many tentacles were formed and attacked her.

(.....A water spirit user!?)

The writhing water tentacles splintered the surrounding trees' branches.

Claire landed on the ground and performed her summoning.

Guardian of the crimson blaze, keeper of the undying hearth!

–Now's the time to abide by the blood contract, come forth and do my bidding!

"–Scarlet!"

A crimson flame-clad hell cat appeared from thin air.

The hell cat immediately transformed into a whip in her hand.

"You, do you understand who you're picking a fight with?"

"Of course, Claire Rouge. The Calamity Queen's younger sister."

"Looks like you really did your research!"

Claire swung down the flame whip.

Drawing a pure red line in the air, it easily mowed down the forests' trees

But the water tentacles coming from the ground easily stopped the flame whip.

"Wha–"

"There's no way onee-chan's flame spirit can defeat this Scylla."

"......Scylla?"

Claire had read that name at the academy.

It was the name of a special-use militarized spirit that could be used by anyone. That flexibility to switch contractors was deemed too dangerous and it was supposed to have been sealed after the Ranbal War–

And then Claire realized.

If she was an assassin that used sealed militarized spirits–

"Don't tell me, you're the one who attacked the flying ship.....kyaa!"

In that moment, a tentacle coming from the ground grasped Claire's foot.

The tentacle wrapped itself all the way around and lifted her into the air.

".....This damn thing, let me go.....!"

She swung her Flametounge with all her might but it did nothing inside the water spirit.

Her opponent's spirit was the worst match-up for her fire spirit.

On top of that, this area weakened flame spirits because of its proximity to water.

Even if it was a high-class spirit like Scarlet, overcoming that was hard.

The tentacles entered into the gaps of her swimsuit.

Wrapping around her thigh, it was a terrible feeling.

"......Ah, n, wh-what are you doing, noo.....!"

"Fufu, what a disgraceful appearance, onee-chan. But I'll let you enjoy it soon."

The girl approached Claire who couldn't move.

"......Why are you targeting me?"

"Because onee-chan has corrupted nii-sama."

"......Nii-sama?"

Claire had a realization. The one that came to her mind was–

"Could this be about Kamito?"

"Don't say nii-sama's name so lightly."

The water tentacle slapped Claire's cheek.

"Ku....."

"If I kill onee-chan, nii-sama will definitely wake up."

"Wh-What do you mean wake up! Kamito is Kamito!"

"Don't speak like you know what you're talking about."

A bone-chilling tone. Shivers ran down Claire's spine.

"Onee-chan, what do you even know about nii-sama?"

"Eh?"

At her words–

Claire widened her eyes.

(.....That's right. I don't know anything about Kamito.)

For example, this girl who called Kamito nii-sama.

This girl probably knew.

Kamito's past that Claire didn't know.

She felt a pain in her heart. She didn't know why.

"Good bye, onee-chan."

The girl gave the command to kill what it had caught–

"......!?"

Then a blade line flashed.

"–Claire!"

Part 5

The short sword pierced the ground.

The girl jumped and landed after turning in the air.

At the instant Scylla's power weakened, Scarlet returned to its hell cat form and destroyed the water tentacle. Kamito caught the released Claire with both arms.

"Ka-Kamito....."

"Claire, stand back."

Kamito placed Claire on the ground and turned to face the girl.

(I didn't think an elementalist would be here–)

He regretted not bringing Est along.

With the last exchange, he understood. His opponent was a skilled assassin.

The short sword disappeared. It was the product of the only spirit magic Kamito could use as the elementalist of a sword spirit – weapon production with Weapon Works .

(So that presence I felt at the lake was this person.....)

Kamito looked at the girl. He couldn't see her face because of the hood.

The girl's lips lightly shook and opened.

".....Nii-sama."

At the same time, the water spirit reformed its tentacles and attacked again.

"Kahaa!"

He took a blow to the stomach.

Kamito flew and smacked into the muddy ground.

"Ouch....."

"Kamito!"

Claire ran up beside the collapsed Kamito.

"Why didn't you dodge it! You should've been able to."

Claire closed her mouth tightly.....that's right, he couldn't dodge it.

".....You covered for me?"

"I can't allow a wound to touch a young lady's face."

Kamito wiped the blood from his mouth and shakily stood up.

Once again, the tentacles swung down like whips.

Kamito raised both arms and blocked. But no matter how strong he was, a human couldn't match up to a spirit.

A blunt attack. The sound of bones being crushed rang out.

"......Aguu!"

"Nii-sama, why are you interrupting me?"

The girl muttered this to the fallen Kamito in a sad tone.

"......Nii-sama?"

He was sure she had called him that at the start as well .

The encroaching girl. From beneath the hood, he spied ash grey hair blowing.

"You, don't tell me you're–"

Kamito's eyes widened.

The girl waved her hand and gave the order to attack–

"Freezing fangs, pierce – Freezing Arrow!"

In an instant, many ice arrows impaled the water spirit .

The water spirit instantly froze. Then–

"Now!"

"–Take this, Blazing Fireball!"

Claire's fireball scored a direct hit.

A fierce blaze.

The frozen water spirit shattered.

"Hmph, that was easy."

Wielding a magic bow, Rinslet swept her hair aside.

Though she was doing such a carefree action, her breathing was ragged from chasing Kamito.

"Rinslet, you're a life saver....."

Kamito stood as he groaned in pain.

Rinslet and Claire equipped their respective elemental waffen and faced the assassin girl.

"Aww, he got killed. It turns out like this if I don't use Jester's Vise."

Sticking out her tongue in a childish manner, she flipped her hood off.

"......!?"

Ash grey twintails. A lovely, youthful face.

Kamito stood shocked at the face that had hardly changed from four years ago.

"Muir....."

"Muir?"

Claire knit her brows.

"Muir, why....."

"Nii-sama, you've become very weak."

The girl sighed sadly and turned around.

"But don't worry, Muir will definitely wake you up."

Saying that, she disappeared into the forest–

"Stop–" "Right there!"

"Wait!"

Kamito stopped Rinslet and Claire who were about to pursue.

"Hey, why are you stopping us!"

"–You can't beat her."

The two gulped at Kamito's serious expression.

And so, the assassin girl completely disappeared.

Chapter 6: Cracks

Part 1

"—Muir Alenstarl."

Kamito muttered that name as he lay on the bed in the dim room.

The number two of the Instructional School who had received the title "Monster."

(.....Why is she here?)

He thought that they would never meet again after that day.

And yet they ended up meeting in such a terrible way.

Muir Alenstarl was an expert military elementalist.

What reason could that girl, an orphan from the Instructional School, have for coming here—

It was not like he couldn't guess. Just a few weeks prior, Kamito had fought with another orphan of the Instructional School, Jio Inzagi.

The one behind the incident that time—

(.....Does she have a connection to Restia?)

His left hand under the leather glove ached.

At that time. A knock came from his room's door.

".....Yes?"

While pressing down on his hurting ribs, Kamito got off the bed.

"Who is it?"

He opened the door and—

".....Nyaa ♪"

A cute cat was there.

No, more accurately, it was somebody wearing cat ears on their head, the Empire's second princess.

"....."

"....."

"......Um. Fianna, what are you doing?"

Kamito asked, astonished.

"I-I have come to s-service my master-meow ♪"

"......"

The air froze.

"Jeez, wh-what are you making me say....."

"No, I don't really understand....."

Fianna cleared her throat and said,

"It is a healing ritual."

"Healing ritual?"

Kamito repeated like a parrot.

"Kamito-kun, you were hurt, right?"

"Yes, well.....it's not anything serious."

"That's a lie."

Fianna poked Kamito's ribcage.

"Owwwwww!"

"Look at that. You can't fool me."

It was the injury he received when he was hit by Muir's water spirit.

He had been hiding it, but it appeared that the holy spirit user had seen through him.

"Come on, lie down on the bed."

"Owaa."

Fianna pulled on Kamito's hand.

Kamito was pushed onto the bed in that manner.

The feeling that had pushed on his chest made his heart throb unconsciously.

"I'm thankful for the healing but.....why cat ears?"

"Fufu, this is a tool for the ritual.....ah, a tool for the ritual-meow ♪"

Fianna quickly amended the end of her sentence.

"Liar! I think something's a little strange with that!"

That morning when she had packed her luggage, he was sure those cat ears had been there.

The other things included rope, a candle and a whip.....she had packed them under the pretense of them being ritual equipment, but there was a lot that was fishy about it.

"Um, Kamito, you don't like this kind of thing?"

Fianna asked with a nervous expression.

"No, I don't d-dislike it....."

Kamito quickly shook his head.

Fianna with cat ears was definitely cute. Seriously cute.

About enough to make him want to pet her.

".....I'm glad. It was pretty embarrassing."

Fianna made an expression of relief and relaxed.

The captivating sound of rustling clothes. The breath coming from near his ear.

".....Fianna!? Y-Your ch-chest is pressing against me."

"Don't move. We have to be touching or there won't be an effect."

"I understand the theory but....."

Kamito gulped.

".....Nn, chuu.....ahn."

The cute princess's lips and her fingertips glided over his bruised ribs. Her moist tongue running over his wound tickled.

"Fufu, Kamito-kun, does it feel good?"

"......!"

Even if asked in this kind of situation, there was no way he could honestly reply.

(.....But it's definitely working. Fianna's ritual magic, that is.)

As expected of a former elite princess maiden of the Divine Ritual Institute.

Even though it wasn't her specialty, her ability in it was top-class.

Not just the wound but even his whole body's fatigue being removed could be felt.

Kamito stopped resisting and left his body in her care.

".....But I'm always surprised by it. Your regenerative ability, I mean."

"Yeah, it's a mystery to me, too."

He hadn't paid particular notice to it, but it appeared to be that way.

It seemed like it was thanks to the development of the divine power of an elementalist flowing within him.

But it was to an abnormal degree in Kamito's case.

"Isn't it because you've contracted with Est?"

"I also thought that at first....."

A contracted spirit's attributes affecting the contractor wasn't anything rare.

For example, Claire's ability to have her hair stand on end was because of this. Because of Est's attribute being metal as a sword spirit, his body may have become robust as a result.

"But it doesn't seem to be just that."

Fianna tilted her head.

The other possibility was a Cursed Armament Seal. Amongst the orphans at the Instructional School that received a Cursed Armament Seal, some possessed regenerative ability that far surpassed human limits.

However, of course, there was no Cursed Armament Seal on Kamito.

"Fianna's technique is good."

Kamito shrugged his shoulders while saying that and received a reply,

"It's the opposite."

"Opposite?"

"My holy attribute spirit magic is barely working on Kamito's body."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know."

Fianna shook her head.

"Of course, it's not like it's totally ineffective — it's being repelled. That's why I have to be touching you like this."

Press.

"......Fianna!?"

"Look at that, your body is so stiff. Relax more."

Fianna smiled teasingly and gave his ear a playful bite.

"W-Wait, as expected this is....."

"Like I said, I wouldn't do this stuff with just anyone, you know?"

To Fianna who pressed her lips together while looking unsatisfied,

"Y-You should only do this kind of stuff to the person you l-like....."

She placed her hand on the shoulder strings of her dress-like uniform—

Dogoooooon!

Suddenly the room's door exploded into smithereens.

"......!?"

Gogogogogogogogo.....!

The one standing there---

It was Claire with a blazing Flametounge in hand.

"Hey, Kamito, wh-wh-wh-what are you doing?"

Kamito seriously prepared himself for death.

Part 2

"Now, choose! The way you'd like to be roasted!"

"That's why I'm saying, that was a healing ritual!"

Five minutes later. Kamito was made to do seiza upon the dusty floor.

In front of him was Claire who was sounding her whip .

Her red twintails were standing on end.....it seemed she was quite angry.

Claire looked down at Kamito with a cold gaze—

"Hmph, with cat ears? And pressed against a large chest in that ma-manner?"

"Guu....."

Kamito internally groaned.

.....It was no good. Regardless of what he said, those cat ears took away all credibility.

"....Well, that's fine."

Said Claire, who shrugged her shoulders and sighed deeply.

"S-Since whatever you do with that erotic queen doesn't concern me."

"Then why are you angry....."

"Sh-Shut up!"

Because of Claire's glare, Kamito shut up.

.....In any case, he was relieved.

Her mood was still bad — but it seemed like she would overlook the situation this time.

But the conversation didn't end there.

"Kamito."

She suddenly became really serious—

"I have something to ask you."

"....."

(.....Well, I guess it's expected.)

He had made his resolve for this.

Or rather, he'd been thinking about it since a while ago.

"The girl who attacked me — you knew her, right?"

"Yeah."

"What did she mean by nii-sama? Who is she?"

"....."

Claire's suspicion was well-founded.

The assassin that had been aiming for her life was his former teammate and friend.

Being interrogated was natural.

"What's wrong? Why aren't you saying anything?"

Claire's voice had a tinge of irritation mixed in.

But Kamito averted his eyes from her and kept quiet.

(I.....)

He felt that he should reveal his relationship with Muir Alenstarl. He knew that in his head.

But if he did that, he would also have to reveal that he was an escapee of the Instructional School.

His childhood when he had battle techniques necessary for an assassin hammered into him.

Something that he could never erase, that unpleasant past.

(If she knew the truth about me, Claire would—)

He might be scorned. Or possibly — he might be pitied.

At any rate, it would be different from now.

He was scared of that.

(My becoming weak might be because of this.....)

He derided himself while avoiding Claire's gaze.

He wouldn't have even thought about this two months ago.

He didn't care how other people viewed him.

If he could get Restia back, then that was all he needed — that's what he thought.

"Claire, sorry....."

".....Why?"

Claire's voice was slightly wavering.

"Is it something you can't tell even me?"

"....."

"Could it be a past lover—"

"Like that's it."

Kamito retorted with half-closed eyes.

"Then why can't you say it?"

"—Can you not trust me if I don't tell you?"

A cold voice with slight irritation that even shocked himself.

He gasped and looked up at Claire who had her eyes wide open in shock.

"Th-That's not it. But—"

"But what?"

"....."

Claire's question was obvious.

He also understood that she was worried for his sake.

But — no, that was the reason, that's why he couldn't tell her.

"But....."

Claire chewed her lip.

"Because you won't talk about yourself at all."

"That's....."

"And it's not just this. Even about that darkness spirit girl—"

"The thing about Restia has nothing to do with Claire."

Kamito shook his head coldly. That showed his complete rejection of her question.

".....Is that so, I see."

Claire breathed out waveringly and—

Turning her back on Kamito, she left the room in silence.

Part 3

"I'm the worst....."

Kamito muttered, sitting on the creaking bed.

He was regretting getting angry with Claire for no real reason.

That said, there was no way he could discuss his past with her.

(If she knew my past, she would.....)

At that moment, Ellis and the others entered his room.

"Kamito, did something happen with Claire?"

Ellis surveyed the room.

"Yeah, just a little something....."

Feeling uncomfortable, Kamito shifted his gaze.

"You fought again?"

Rinslet sighed. Kamito nodded ambiguously.

"She really can't be helped. Well, she'll be back before the dance."

"Dance?"

"The opening ceremony's dance. Of course, Kamito will also be attending, right?"

Fianna asked.

"No, I'm fine."

"What did you say!?" "What!?" "Kamito-kun!"

When Kamito shook his head, the three cried out at the same time.

"Wh-Why?"

"......I don't like dances."

Kamito had a little trauma concerning the dance.

The Blade Dance he participated in three years ago as Ren Ashbell. Remembering all the dance invitations he received during that time gave him goosebumps even now.

Of course, he wasn't going to be dressed in girls' clothing this time around so there was no direct connection, but he still couldn't erase that feeling.

"That and I have no formal wear."

"They'll lend you formal wear if you ask."

"I said I wasn't going."

"Hmm, I wonder if that's a good idea?"

Fianna laughed lightly.

"......What do you mean?"

"The Blade Dance participants will be coming out at the dance, meaning that Ren Ashbell will also be attending."

"......!"

"Fufu, so what will you do?"

To the Fianna wearing a teasing smile, Kamito—

"......Okay then."

Grudgingly agreed to go.

(.....The dance, huh.)

Claire would also wear a dress — that thought popped into his head.

"......I have to apologize."

Kamito got off the creaky bed.

"Kamito-san, where are you going?"

"To find a cat. It may have become lost."

Chapter 7: Darkness Spirit Girl

Part 1

"---What was that, stupid, stupid, stupid Kamito!"

With her hair standing on end, Claire ran through the castle's hallway.

She wiped the large tears forming in her eyes with her sleeve.

---Has nothing to do with Claire.

Those words replayed in Kamito's cold tone over and over in her head.

(I'm not trusted by Kamito.....)

She became very sad when she thought that.

---Onee-chan, what do you even know about nii-sama?

That assassin girl had said that to Claire.

(That's right, I don't know anything about Kamito.....)

Her heart hurt. The inside of her throat was painful.

What is this feeling, she wondered.

(.....Why won't you tell me anything?)

She stopped running, wiped her tears and then trudged along.

The girls in dresses turned to look at her with puzzled expressions.

(.....That's right, the dance is tonight.)

The truth is that she had been anticipating it since yesterday.

Along with the new swimsuit, she had also prepared a new dress.

(It, it's not like I'm wearing it for him or anything.....)

Claire quickly removed the image of Kamito's face from her mind.

(But I wonder what kind of face he'd make if he saw me in my dress.....)

While zoning out and thinking about that kind of thing, her face grew red.

(Wh-what am I thinking. I already don't care about that Ka-Kamito!)

While she was biting her lip.

Suddenly a heat wave came from below her as a hell cat clad in flames appeared.

".....What's wrong, Scarlet?"

Claire asked while leaning over.

"Do you want a snack? I have canned tuna at the room. "

Scarlet shook its head.

And then she noticed the silver chain shaking in Scarlet's mouth.

"That's....."

A silver cat pendant.

The present that Kamito had bought for her birthday two weeks ago.

It looked like it had been taken out of the jewelry box where she had placed it.

"Wh-what is it, jeez....."

Claire took the pendant into her hand.

The first birthday present she had ever received from a boy.

She had been truly happy at that time.

"....."

She held the pendant to her chest like a treasure.

".....That's right. That back there was also partially my fault."

She sighed as she patted Scarlet's head.

(.....I can only become honest when I'm not in front of him.)

Part 2

"......Where did that Claire go?"

Kamito was traversing the maze-like castle in search of Claire.

.....Rather, he was completely lost.

Whatever the case, the original structure was a completely strange design from the mythical age. With the repeated alterations over the course of several hundred years, the hallways stretched out in every other way to form a maze. All of the rooms looked the same, so it threw off one's sense of direction.

(.....With this kind of thing, not getting lost would be strange.)

With the sun setting, the ceremony drew closer.

(I should return to my room. We might just miss each other, after all.)

And Kamito came to a halt.

In the middle of the hallway was a garden complete with a water fountain.

"Ohh, that's amazing....."

His gaze was drawn in by that beautiful sight.

Countless flowers were growing and small light spirits gathered there.

The water gushing from the fountain was filled with purity.

(This might be where princess maidens purify themselves.)

While thinking that, Kamito drew closer to the garden.

The light spirits floating in the air ran away like newborn spiders.

Near the water fountain were five stone sculptures.

The images of five Elemental Lords that controlled Astral Zero.

A warrior wielding a blazing sword --- Fire Elemental Lord, Volcanicus.

A boy with kind eyes --- Wind Elemental Lord, Belphal .

An iron mallet-wielding giant --- Earth Elemental Lord , Lode Gear.

A woman hugging a water jug to her chest --- Water Elemental Lord, Iseria Seaward.

An aged man with a scale and bishop's staff --- Holy Elemental Lord, Alexandros.

Those that bring prosperity or hardship to all of humanity, the kings of all spirits.

Of course, the spirits did not actually look like their sculptures.

The images here were simply representations of what people imagined their qualities to be when put in human form.

"These are also relics from the mythical age....."

They were magnificent sculptures. At the very least, they were not products of the last several hundred years. Kamito didn't possess much knowledge about historic ruins but he knew that much.

The stones used were not just normal stones either. Valuable spirit crystals had been used.

Getting close and looking,

"Hm?"

Kamito saw something out of place.

The five sculptures which copied the likeness of the Elemental Lords. Beside them was---

With nothing remaining above the knees, another sculpture was there.

That was something that was completely foreign to the garden.

(.....Why is this thing here?)

The tragic appearance of the sculpture with only what was below its knees remaining. It hadn't been removed

afterward, so it was obviously an important ancient legacy.

".....!?"

Just then. Something floated into Kamito's mind.

(The true shrine from the ancient age's true shrine.....)

Along with the five Elemental Lords, there was one spot that was unnaturally missing something.

(Est whispered something back then.....)

They had been in a hurry so he had missed it but.....

"If I remember....."

"---The one erased in the following age, Darkness Elemental Lord, Ren Ashdoll."

Suddenly from behind came a voice---

Kamito immediately spun around.

A beautiful girl with black hair clad in a dress the color of darkness stood beside the water fountain.

She had a teasing smile. Gentle twilight pupils.

The one he'd been searching for --- the girl he always wanted to meet was right there.

"Restia....."

"For someone searching for a cat, you look like you've seen a ghost."

She smiled and walked towards him with light steps.

"....."

Kamito was frozen still. He simply stood with his eyes wide open.

The girl of darkness came before Kamito and stood on her tiptoes.

"You've really grown. Even though you were only about as tall as me back then."

"Restia, you....."

Kamito returned from the shock.

"Don't make such a scary face, Kamito."

"......!"

A gentle and sweet voice that lured one into sleep.

It hadn't changed. Not a single thing, not even that harshness from three years ago had changed.

The seal on his left hand heated up like it was burning.

(.....Why are you making that kind of face!)

---Who are you?

---Why are you throwing my heart into chaos using Restia's form!

The truth is he really wanted to shout those things to the girl before him.

But---

Those accusations stuck in his throat.

.....I know. She's the real Restia.

No matter what form she took, there was no way he could ever mistake her.

The girl who had been the first light for Kamito who had closed his heart.

She had stayed by his side and granted him warmth and peace.

But now---

"....."

Kamito strongly chewed his lip.

Three years ago, he thought that would never change.

He had no idea why she had changed like this.

Possibly, something had broken when she made her Wish.

(Three years ago, I---)

Just what was the wish requested of the Elemental Lords.

He had many things he wanted to ask.

And many things he needed to ask.

Kamito opened his mouth while still slightly lost.

"Restia....."

"Hm?"

The darkness spirit tilted her head in a lovely manner.

"That militarized spirit that attacked the flying ship, was it your doing?"

"Those were *her* orders. It wasn't me."

Restia replied with that and sat down on the broken sculpture.

With her feet together and resting her chin in her hands, she possessed the beauty of a fallen goddess.

"Is that referring to the fake Ren Ashbell?"

"She's not a replacement for you, Kamito."

Restia smiled gently.

Just like one would use when warning a young child.

"She is also a true Ren Ashbell."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm sorry, but I cannot reveal that to the current you."

Restia silently declined her head.

".....Why did you appear before me now?"

"To warn you."

"Warn me?"

"Your past is trying to destroy what you hold dear."

"My past....."

Kamito muttered---

"---The Instructional School's orphans, huh."

"Yes. Muir Alenstarl is ignoring *her* orders and rampaging on her own. Well, it seems like *she* is closing her eyes on the matter though."

"Why is Muir targeting us?"

"Isn't that obvious. Because her beloved onii-chan was taken from her."

"....."

Yes, Muir Alenstarl had not shown any signs that Kamito was her target.

If he was, there would be no way she would have overlooked him when he couldn't use his elemental waffe.

Claire was a superior elementalist. Rinslet and Ellis as well, and Fianna was contracted to a powerful knight spirit.

But even though they were elementalists, they were still normal girls.

They were high-class young ladies that were gentle, not honest, and liked black tea and sweet candies.

(But the orphans from the Instructional School are different---)

Like Kamito had been---

They were existences that had only been brought up with knowledge on how to wreak havoc and slaughter.

That was not blade dance for the sake of enjoyment --- it was only for war.

The world the noble young ladies from the academy lived in was completely different.

Even if they were Blade Dance representatives, there was not a chance they could win in a battle.

"---I won't allow that to happen."

Kamito gave a small groan.

Claire, Ellis, Fianna, Rinslet and Est---

"I will definitely protect my companions."

"I wonder if you can?"

Restia put her fingertip to her lips---

"The orphans from the Instructional School are like the past you. I don't think you can stop them when you had a hard battle against the likes of Jio Inzagi."

"It doesn't matter. I will protect them at the cost of my life."

"Hmm, I'm a little jealous."

"---That's why, I will protect you as well, Restia."

"......!?"

Restia's eyes widened.

Those twilight pupils finally showed unrest.

"---That part of you hasn't changed a bit."

She shrugged her shoulders and slowly stood.

She stepped in front of him and---

"I'm happy, Kamito."

Tiptoed and kissed Kamito.

".....!?"

Kamito froze for a few seconds.

The inside of his head had numbed and become pure white.

".....Mm."

Restia slowly parted lips with Kamito.

And she once again whispered into the ear of the dumbfounded Kamito.

"I'll be waiting, Kamito. For your awakening as the successor of the Demon King."

"Res.....tia.....?"

Kamito reached out but grabbed nothing but thin air.

The darkness spirit girl had turned into a black mist and disappeared from in front of Kamito.

Part 3

"....."

Claire stood in the shadow of the hall leading to the garden.

She had discovered Kamito talking with the darkness spirit girl while searching for Kamito.

That darkness spirit girl was dangerous --- she had immediately summoned Scarlet but desisted from attacking when she saw him talking with her.

They were like two lovers that had been parted for a long time.

Like that, Claire had missed the timing to come out.

She couldn't hear the contents of their conversation well from the hallway.

If she wanted to, she might have been able to listen in, but learning about the past Kamito didn't want to discuss in this way felt like she was doing something underhanded.

Thinking like that, she ended up just watching.

She saw the two kiss.

"Ah---"

Splash.

Tears fell to the ground.

(No way, why are tears.....)

She wiped her eyes with the sleeve of her uniform.

(Why, why am I.....)

Why was this --- her chest hurt.

(.....Kamito didn't hate it. He didn't resist at all.)

The overflowing tears wouldn't stop.

Claire ran from that spot and dashed down the hallway.

Part 4

The floating island Ragna Ys' underground cave within the sacred grounds.

A place that no one but the Divine Ritual Institute's princess maidens were permitted to enter --- currently, there were two sets of footsteps resounding there.

One belonged to an orphan of the Instructional School, Lily Flame.

She read the reports to her master in front of her.

"Muir Alenstarl lost Death Gaze in the battle. The country's military executives are going to be angry."

"Let them. They're just a bunch of geezers that only think about how to protect themselves."

The listening party said so with a merciless tone.

The girl with long black hair that fell to her waist.

Donning a black overcoat with a crimson mask that looked like a fierce god covering her face.

Lily was not surprised in the least by her master's response. Their supposed allies, the Alphas Theocracy, were only another tool for her to accomplish her goal.

"But Cardinal, the supply of militarized spirits from now on---"

"Lily, I've taught you not to use that name here, haven't I?"

"I apologize. ---Ren Ashbell."

Lily shivered at her master's cold voice.

Footsteps resounded throughout the silent underground cave. The radiance of the spirit stone they were carrying reflected off the strange carvings in the wall. It was a mystery why this passage in the underground cave that even the Divine Ritual Institute's princess maidens were prohibited from was known to these two.

Possibly high-ranking princess maidens --- also those close to Queens could enter without it being strange.

"It seems that Restia has contacted him."

The crimson mask-wearing girl --- Ren Ashbell said.

"Yes. She ignored your order and---"

"That darkness spirit is not a subordinate but an equal in the organization. She has no obligation to listen to me."

".....Yes."

Lily chewed her lip, unsatisfied. It frustrated her that the pieces gathered to help her master were moving on their own.

The ones who had sworn an oath to Cardinal --- to Ren Ashbell, consisted of Lily alone. Her fellow orphan from the Instructional School thought of nothing other than Kazehaya Kamito and she had no idea what that darkness spirit girl was thinking.

"I will be meeting with him as well this evening."

"Will you be attending the dance?"

Lily asked in a slightly incredulous voice.

"Ren Ashbell was the winner of the previous Blade Dance. There is no way she could not attend."

"But the preparations for what to wear---"

"I have at least one dress. Though I left the majority to my little sister."

"You have a little sister?"

"....."

There was no response to that question.

Thinking she had upset her master, Lily quickly changed topics.

"Muir reported that he doesn't appear to have awakened yet."

"We already have no time to wait for it. If he can't withstand it, then that was his worth as a successor to the Demon King --- we'd just have to alter the plan."

"---That won't do. It's Muir's duty to awaken nii-sama."

Said a voice from within the darkness behind them.

The one who appeared was the girl with ash grey hair --- Muir Alenstarl.

"Muir, what did you do!?"

Lily raised a sharp voice.

"I just played around a little. With those onee-chans that are corrupting nii-sama."

"......Acting on your own! You used another militarized spirit without permission."

"Not anything important. Just the special-use militarized spirit Scylla. Though it was too weak and died. I wonder if I could use a better spirit next time."

"......!"

To the Muir who was puffing her cheeks, Lily responded by holding her head in her hands.

Even if it was Scylla, which wasn't a pure war class spirit, it was still a part of the theocracy's military strength. Those military executives wouldn't be happy if they heard about this.

"Listen here. That group at the theocracy won't be supplying us with militarized spirits until the Blade Dance really begins."

"Hmph, we've been acting docile well enough."

"It's because you ignored orders and lost Death Gaze."

"I just wanted to play with nii-sama."

Muir pouted her lips.

"Anyway, behave yourself until the real Blade Dance begins. Don't lay a hand on him until you receive orders---"

"Orders?"

Muir tilted her head in wonder.

And the light in her eyes disappeared.

"Hey, Lily, just who will order Muir?"

"---!?"

Shivers ran down Lily's spine.

Her entire body ran cold with fear. It was like someone was holding her heart in their hands.

"Hey, tell me---"

The spirit seal on Muir's right hand let out an ominous light---

"Muir Alenstarl."

Ren Ashbell called out to her.

"Yes?"

"You are an equal to me in the organization. Nobody will order you."

Muir laughed with a smile.

"It's fine if you understand. The only one that can order Muir is nii-sama."

With Muir's mood restored, Lily breathed a sigh of relief.

"But this is troubling. I can't play with the onee-chans without a militarized spirit."

"Then why not try using this --- Monster."

Ren Ashbell removed her ring and tossed it to Muir.

"This is?"

Muir looked at the ring curiously.

It was a plain silver ring. Thin characters from the spirit language were engraved onto its outer edge.

"The annihilation spirit Tiamat --- a spirit weapon that was created to fight the army of the ex-shadow Elemental Lord. It was customized by those of the Divine Ritual Institute. It can withstand your Jester's Vise well."

"......You're giving this to Muir?"

"Use it as you wish."

"I don't really understand why. Well, that's fine, I'll take it."

"Muir, militarized spirits aren't toys!"

"They are toys. At least to Muir."

She shrugged her shoulders at Lily---

And licked the ring that now adorned her middle finger.

"---Just a little longer, nii-sama. Muir will remove those meddlesome onee-chans."

While walking through the dark underground cave, Muir smiled to herself.

When she had been taken to the Instructional School, she was only four years old.

Born in a cold village on the borderline of the Empire, she was not of noble blood and yet possessed the ability to contract spirits.

The villagers rejoiced at having borne an elementalist and raised her dearly.

And then they brought her before the village's guardian spirit on her fourth birthday.

They wanted Muir to contract with the guardian spirit so the village would prosper.

But when she made the contract, the guardian spirit ran wild.

The flames that had protected the village now burned it down and the spirit also destroyed itself.

Muir's power --- she had the uncanny ability to drive a spirit mad.

After being cast away by her village, she was picked up by the instructional school---

There, she became a Monster.

Her heart was lost, a Cursed Armament Seal was engraved on her young body and she was taught nothing but slaughter techniques.

Because of her in-born ability, Muir could never connect with a contracted spirit.

Those days filled with only isolation and massacres slowly carved away her heart.

In the middle of those days --- she met with a boy that had been taken to the facility.

"You're always alone, huh."

"That's right. Muir is always alone. The only ones Muir talks with are those she kills."

"Then I'll become your friend."

"Hmph, how stupid. Talking about friends in this place."

"Then a brother. Muir is the younger sister."

"......What are you deciding on your own, idiot."

The first conversation she had with him. It was something he definitely didn't remember.

"---Nii-sama is Muir's only."

When she emerged from the underground cave, the sun had mostly set.

It was about the time the Blade Dance's ceremony would begin at the castle.

"That's why I won't forgive them. I will definitely get them, those attaching themselves to nii-sama."

Chapter 8: Ball Dance

It was evening. The Blade Dance ceremony began at the castle serving as lodging for the representatives.

There were already many guests of honor assembled that were having friendly conversations in the grand hall of the castle.

There was elegant music flowing about, and chandeliers that were arranged lavishly with spirit crystals as decoration.

Extravagant seafood, meat, and fruit were laid out on a table lined up in the center.

Those invited to the ceremony were elementalists representing various countries and high-ranking royalty and nobles.

“This time, my country’s representative will be getting the victory.”

“What? The most superb elementalist is in my White Knights, you know?”

Even though they behaved politely on the surface, they unfolded a fierce war of words. Dressed in a formal suit, Kamito glanced at those nobles with an expression of being completely fed up.

(…Geez, it's not like you're the ones doing the blade dance…)

On the other side, the girls participating in the Blade Dance had nervous expressions.

They were equally competent, top-notch elementalists selected by the major nations of the continent.

These girls were about the same age as Kamito, and that was because the condition to partake in the Blade Dance was set that princess maidens had to be 20 years old and younger, following the oracle by the Elemental Lords.

This wasn't restricted to the Blade Dance. Most of the important ceremonies dedicated to the spirits had the same condition. Spirits liked young pure maidens as offerings the best.

"…Anyway, they are still not here, huh?"

Holding a plate of a sauté of duck meat, Kamito looked around his surroundings relentlessly.

He still couldn't see his young lady teammates.

Perhaps, they might have come across difficulties in putting on their dresses—but what was in his mind was whether Claire, who he had quarreled with, was coming.

After all, he wouldn't be able to meet up with her in the castle later.

Looking at the entrance of the hall, he caught sight of one princess maiden being caught in a spot.

"Please don't bring your animal inside!"

"Um, it isn't a beast! This wolf is a friend of the forest!"

"Even if it's a friend, no means no!"

…It seemed like the Druid girl was leading a wolf into the hall.

Although she was from a different team, it was a little embarrassing as they were representing the same academy.

Sighing in resignation, Kamito cast his sight downwards.

"Est, do you want to get something?"

He asked the sword-spirit girl holding a plate.

"I'd like fish next, Kamito."

"Hn, you're a good girl for not being picky. All the young ladies have unbalanced diets."

Suri-suri *Nade-Nade*

While he praised her, he stroked her head, and Est squinted.

Wearing a pure-white dress, Est was lovely, almost like a snow-fairy.

"…Est is cute."

Stroking her head, he subconsciously let out his voice.

Est's small ears twitched.

"Kamito?"

"Ah, it's nothing…"

Kamito scratched his head in an attempt to dodge her question.

…That was a little embarrassing.

"Kamito, please say it once more."

"Uh?"

"Once more."

Est was gazing intently at Kamito with her mysterious eyes.

"E-Est is cute."

"Kamito, once more."

"You're cute, Est."

"More…"

"You're cute, Est."

"Kamito-kun, what are you doing?"

"Owa!"

Turning around—Fianna, dressed in a white dress, was staring at Kamito with reproachful eyes.

"Erm, that was, err…"

Upon trying to explain in a fluster—

"Before that, don't you have anything to say?"

"Eh? A-Ahh…"

Even Kamito wasn't such a quiet unsociable person to not notice that. No, as he didn't notice until it was pointed out, he might indeed have been a quiet unsociable person.

Kamito gulped.

It was a white dress, with a big opening at her chest area. Despite the daring design showing off her skin, the reason he could feel a sense of graceful elegance was because she was a real princess.

"…W-White also suits you."

"Is that all?"

Seeming peevish, the princess pouted her lips.

"…Erm, you're using pads."

"I'm going to get angry, you know?"

"Wa-Wait!"

Fianna puffed out her cheeks. Kamito shook his head in a fluster.

And then—

"…You're really pretty."

He finally put his honest thoughts into his mouth.

"Hn, you pass. Kamito, your suit also suits you well."

"…Why you. You made me say embarrassing things in public."

"Fufu, it's a punishment for not praising me from the beginning."

Kamito could only sigh at Fianna, who impishly smiled.

"Hn, that reminds me, where's Est?"

Before he knew it, he noticed that Est had disappeared.

Looking around his surroundings, he saw Est moving towards the dessert corner while holding onto her plate.

Upon meeting Kamito's eyes, she quickly turned her face away.

"It looked like you offended Miss Fairy."

"Why is Est offended?"

"Fufu, you're not allowed to praise another girl in front of a girl."

Fianna morosely poked Kamito's chest with her finger.

"Ka-Kamito-san, so here you are."

This time, it was Rinslet, who came in a dress.

It was a striking marine-blue dress. Her glittering, platinum-blonde hair was tied up, and that appearance of hers was akin to that of a snow queen reigning over a country of ice.

Her cheeks were faintly flushed and reddened, and her lips had a glamorous, rosy color.

Her usual uniform appearance was indeed lovely, but —

This dressed-up Rinslet was so beautiful that he almost let out a sigh.

“Rinslet, you’re pretty.”

“Eh?”

Rinslet widely opened her eyes.

Her face turned red in the blink of an eye.

“Fua, wh-what are you saying?!”

The Ice-Snow Queen’s face melted in an instant.

"Hmm, Kamito-kun, you say these things to anyone, do you? As expected of the Demon King of the Night."

"I only did as you advised, Fianna!"

Kamito glared with reproachful eyes at Fianna, who pouted her lips unhappily.

"That reminds me, is Claire with the two of you?"

"She returned to the room just now. Kamito-san, you have not met up with her, have you?"

"…Yeah."

It seemed like when Kamito went to look for her, they passed each other.

"Geez, that girl, she has always been really troublesome."

Rinslet puffed out her cheeks.

(…This means she's still angry.)

Kamito made a heavy sigh in his mind. If she came to the dance, he'd even bear with her cooking later, or something— That was what he was thinking.

"…E-Erm, Kamito-san."

"Uh?"

Rinslet bashfully called out to Kamito.

"Erm, since we're here, err…"

Cough *cough* The young lady coughed several times.

Then, like she gained her determination—

"Would you like to dance with me?"

"…Me?"

Kamito was perplexed.

"…Is that not okay?"

"No, I'm happy that you invited me, but is it alright for it to be me?"

"Y-Yes, I'm a little afraid about dancing with the other men."

"…I see. However, I only know the basic steps."

Kamito was taught the dance steps by Greyworth three years ago.

Honestly, he couldn't say he was confident, and they were certainly not in fashion now.

"I-In that case, I'll teach you!"

However, Rinslet let out her voice happily.

"Hn, is that so? Rinslet, if you're fine with it, then I'm counting on you."

Kamito was also a boy of age.

To be able to dance with such a cute girl like Rinslet, his heart was honestly pounding.

He gently held Rinslet's graceful hand covered by a white glove.

"…Th-This is Kamito-san's hand…."

Rinslet blushed.

"…H-How sly, me too."

Then, Fianna grasped his other hand.

"H-Hey, Fianna!? We can't dance like this…"

"That's right! Quickly release his hand!"

Fianna and Rinslet were pulling Kamito's hands.

Both of their breasts touched his arms and he was flustered.

…Before they knew it, the three of them were basked in the attention from their surroundings.

"I wonder what they're doing?" "A fighting scene?" " They look like the representatives of the Areishia Spirit Academy." "Don't they even know the manners at a ball dance?" "That's that male elementalist." "Ah, that—" " Forcing unwilling girls to…" "To collect the two as his targets." "He's surely collecting his night targets as well. " "What infamy!" "But he's kind of cool…"

Numerous whispers were being exchanged.

(Eh, why is the reproach only concentrated on me….)

Then—

"Y-You three! Don't disrupt the public morals in the presence of the Elemental Lords!"

A gallant and serious voice came flying over.

"E-Ellis!?"

The one running over was Ellis in a dress.

Ellis pulled Kamito's arm, and skillfully pulled him off the two young ladies.

"Kyaa, what are you doing?"

"Captain, what are you doing?!"

"No, what are you two doing, good grief…"

Placing her hand at her waist, Ellis strictly scolded the two who complained.

“We came here to represent our academy. You should be more self-aware.”

Then, she glared at Kamito this time.

“Kamito, you too—”

She became stiff at that point.

“What's wrong, Ellis?”

Thinking that he was going to have a sermon, Kamito was let down.

Ellis slightly blushed, and entwined her fingers bashfully in front of her chest.

“E-Erm, even a suit fits you, surprisingly. I guess that's what they mean by 'the clothes make the man'.”

“Is that so? I’m not really comfortable with suits, but—”

While bashfully scratching his head, Kamito looked at Ellis’ appearance in a dress.

What she was wearing was a brilliant pure-white dress . In contrast to Ellis' gallant image, this was a very girlish dress arranged with plenty of frills.

"Ellis, yours suits you well too. It's like you're a princess and you look cute."

"Wh…"

Her ponytail hair sprung up.

"Ah, uh… N-No way, m-me being cute…!"

Ellis turned red and got into a panic.

"Um, Kamito-kun!"

"Kamito-san?'

Fianna and Rinslet were glaring at him.

"Wh-What is it…"

"—It looks like the rumors are true, Kazehaya Kamito. "

"…?"

When Kamito turned to the voice of those biting words , a familiar girl was sharply staring at him.

“Y-You’re!?”

She had an azure dress with a dragon insignia at the chest area. She had put on a hat with a feather attached to it.

Leonora Lancaster.

As the captain of the Knights of the Dragon Emperor, she was the ace of Dracunia.

“As I thought, I should have cut it off at that time.”

While Leonora glared at Kamito, she regretfully bit her lips.

A chill ran in Kamito’s spine.

“Dragon Princess Leonora Lancaster, I’ve been hearing rumors about you lately.”

Suddenly, Ellis placed her hand at her chest, faced her, and paid her respect as a knight.

"And you are?"

"Areishia Spirit Academy representative, Ellis Fahrengart."

"The Fahrengarts—The one that turned out that Velsaria Eva?"

Ellis lifted her head and nodded.

"This time, Aneue isn't participating due to some circumstances, but I've heard that you're a pure and selfless knight. I'm pleased to be able to cross swords with a knight like you."

She faced Leonora and reached out her dominant hand .

"It seems like splendid knights exist even in the empire."

Leonora smiled, and grasped her hand without hesitation.

With both being fellow knights, they may have some things over which they can empathize with each other.

(…Certainly, those two are like glue.)

Kamito made a wry smile in his heart.

"However, that's just regrettable. A splendid knight like yourself is being kept as Kazehaya Kamito's lover—"

"Hey, wait a moment."

Kamito shouted in a fluster.

(S-She, what did she—)

"Ah, lover!?"

Ellis turned red all the way till her ears and shouted.

"H-How shameless… I-I'm his lover—"

"That's right, Ellis. Deny it please!"

"I'm… not his lover… but if Kamito wished for it, I'll even…"

…Eh? Why is she mumbling?

"…What a frightening boy. You even corrupted such a splendid knight."

"I'm saying that's not it! Ellis, please quickly clear up this misunderstanding!"

"…S-Shut up! A-Are you not satisfied with me being your lover?!"

"What are you saying!?"

Kamito retorted, and at that time.

A small commotion was occurring at the entrance of the hall.

"That girl finally came."

Rinslet muttered.

Kamito quickly looked towards the entrance.

The one at the center of the commotion was—

"Claire!?"

Claire Rouge, who was dressed in a crimson dress.

Her red twintail hair was tied up with ribbons. She was wearing polished enamel red high heels.

Pinching the side of her skirt with laces attached, she entered the hall.

Her breasts were small but her balanced proportion was plenty charming.

She was a beautiful girl, pretty as a rose and noble as a wildcat.

Claire's appearance made Kamito fascinated to the point of taking his breath away.

She had such brilliantness that she overshadowed the surrounding girls that were dressed-up.

She didn't just fascinate Kamito. Everyone in the hall leaked out a breath of admiration.

"As expected of Rubia-sama's sister. She was born a beauty."

It was vexing but she lost— Fianna shrugged her shoulders.

"It's really been a while since I've seen Claire in a dress."

Rinslet slightly opened her mouth.

The commotion at the hall increasingly became bigger.

“Hey, is that red haired girl also a representative of the Blade Dance.”

“Um, so this is what they mean by spirits liking pure and beautiful girls, indeed—”

“Hey, aren’t you going to invite someone to a dance?”

It seemed like a group of young nobles were setting their eyes on Claire.

All the whispers being exchanged made Kamito slightly irritated.

(…You guys aren’t fit to be that young hell cat lady's partner.)

He cursed in his heart as if to spit out the irritation of unknown origin.

At that moment, Claire looked over, and their eyes met .

"Claire—"

As he was about to call out to her—

She instantly looked away, so he swallowed his words.

…It seemed like she was still angry.

Losing the timing to call out to her, Kamito stood still.

Claire ignored the nobles ogling her, and walked towards the center.

He began to hear such voices from within the commotion over there.

"That that conflagration-like red hair… Don't tell me, she's the daughter of that Duke Elstein family?"

"The sister of the Calamity Queen that brought about disaster to the Ordesia Empire?"

"…What an ill omen. She's a devilish girl."

It seemed like there were people who knew Claire's lineage among the participants of the ball.

Whispers of unrest were spreading like wild fire—

It was not that she couldn't hear them, however, Claire stayed composed.

Then, a young noble stepped forward before her.

"Would you like to dance a tune with me, my fire-haired lady?"

His atmosphere seemed frivolous but he was quite a handsome man.

He seemed to be an especially high-ranking person even among the nobles, as he led a group of followers in his surroundings.

"Hey, hey, are you serious?"

"Young master, I'm also worried about you playing with fire."

His companions made a bitter smile. The boy seemed to be a royalty of some country.

"Why he…"

Kamito groaned from within his throat.

He couldn't see the sincerity of a person asking for a dance in the boy's expression. It was just that he knew about Claire being that Calamity Queen's sister, and called out to her out of interest.

Claire—

"I'm sorry, but I'll have to decline."

She coldly declined the boy's invitation.

It was natural. That hell cat girl wouldn't even be emotionally attached to anyone.

"What was that?"

One of the followers looked daunted.

"Well, well, it's fine to have such strong-willed girls once in a while."

The boy nodded, full of composure, and forcibly grabbed Claire's arm.

And then—

"Now, beautiful girl, I'll give your hand a kiss—"

"…Huh?"

Claire stiffened.

(What are you thinking, you stupid noble!?)

As an elementalist princess maiden, a kiss is the most sacred ceremony of a spirit contract.

Even if it was on the hand, it was unforgivable to thoughtlessly request for that.

With such a rude action of his, the sound of commotion occurred even from the surrounding.

"…Don't touch me!"

Claire sharply shouted.

Normally, she'd act tough, but the truth was that she was a young lady who wasn't used to men. Her voice slightly trembled.

Being unable to watch on, Kamito was about to leave, and at that moment—

"What do you think you're doing putting on airs. I'm the crown prince of the Balstan Kingdom."

"No, let go! You—"

Pan— A high pitched sound resound in the hall.

Claire slapped the boy.

She then turned to and ran towards the entrance of the hall.

"Damn her, my face—"

"What uncivilized…"

"It's because she's the sister of that Calamity Queen."

The crown prince of the Balstan and his followers raised words of criticism.

(… You should be just grateful that you didn't turn into cinders!)

Kamito cursed and then he ran after Claire—

"Wait, Claire!"

"Kamito-san!"

Then, Rinslet grabbed his arm.

"Rinslet, why did you stop me?!"

"I'll go."

"But—"

"Kamito-san, if you, who are in the middle of a quarrel , go, it'll just make things complicated. After all, I'm her childhood friend, so I understand that girl."

"…"

Kamito thought for a few seconds—

"…I understand. I'll entrust Claire to you."

He obediently nodded.

Rinslet went running after Claire.

"Kamito-kun"

At this moment, Fianna perceptively whispered into his ear.

“What?”

“She’s here—”

“She?”

Kamito was shocked.

A commotion, which was way greater than the one just now, was occurring near the entrance of the hall.

The person of the highest profile in this round’s Blade Dance had appeared.

Sounds of hard shoes sounded, and she entered.

She was in a jet-black dress like a queen ruling over the night.

She was a black haired girl with her face covered by a scarlet red mask.

She was the strongest blade dancer—Ren Ashbell.

Chapter 9: Brand of Darkness

Part 1

(That's the other Ren Ashbell—)

The girl clad in pure black gave off an overwhelming pressure.

Approaching carelessly would result in becoming ashes — this impression was felt.

Once the commotion settled, a painful silence descended.

"....."

Everyone gulped as they watched her.

Like with Claire, nobody approached her.

A chill ran down Kamito's spine.

(.....I, can I win against her?)

Before he realized it, the flowing music had stopped.

The strongest blade dancer stopped in the middle of the hall—

And turned and walked towards him.

"......!?"

"Kamito-kun." "Kamito."

Fianna had unconsciously grabbed Kamito's sleeve. Even Ellis who should have Ren Ashbell as her goal was cowering.

"....."

Kamito moved before them in a protective manner.

Ren Ashbell stopped just before Kamito.

"—So you are Kazehaya Kamito, huh."

A voice akin to solid steel.

"Yeah."

Kamito nodded.

"Nice to meet you — I wonder if that's appropriate? Ren Ashbell."

Licking his lips cynically, he glared at the red mask.

However, he could not read any sort of emotion from the red eyes within.

And she held out her right hand.

"......?"

To the puzzled Kamito —

"Kazehaya Kamito, would you dance with me for one song?"

She suggested something unexpected.

(.....No, this isn't a suggestion. It's an order.)

Her tone was peaceful, but a refusal — it held a power that wouldn't allow that.

Kamito turned towards Ellis and Fianna and—

"Sorry, won't you let me go for a little while?"

"B-But, Kamito—"

".....Okay. Ellis, let's go."

With that, Fianna grabbed Ellis' hand. She knew Kamito's identity as the real Ren Ashbell. The wise princess had understood the situation.

"Do you have experience in dancing?"

"If it's classical, yeah."

Kamito replied sharply and took Ren Ashbell's hand.

The paused musical performance started up again.

Part 2

In the dark forest surrounding the castle, Claire ran.

Various tree branches grabbed at the crimson dress, tearing it apart.

Mud stuck to her red high heels. Countless wounds appeared on her smooth skin.

Without minding any of that, she ran.

(Why.....)

No matter how long passed, that scene would not leave her head.

When that darkness spirit girl kissed Kamito, that moment.

(.....I-It's not like I think anything of him!)

As if to shake off that irritating feeling, Claire shook her head.

It was just that ignoring his master and doing that kind of thing with another girl was unforgivable.

(.....That's right, that's all it is.)

But—

Why then, did her heart hurt this much?

Just before, holding that man's hand, she had hated it.

If it was Kamito, he wouldn't do anything that violent.

He teased Claire a lot, always treating her like a kid, occasionally saying mean things, but still.

—But still, he would never do something like that.

Before she realized it, she had arrived at the lake from the afternoon's purification.

Inside the silent forest. Numerous spirits floated upon the lake.

Claire hugged her knees and sat at the lake's edge.

The dress she had prepared was filthy and either way she couldn't return to the dance.

Her hair was disheveled and her dress was ruined beyond repair.

"What's with him, that idiot....."

With a terribly miserable mood, Claire sighed.

With a light plop, tears started falling to the ground.

".....That's wrong. The stupid one is me."

She couldn't be honest once again.

If she had, she could be dancing with Kamito right now—

At that time. From with the forest, footsteps could be heard.

".....Kamito?"

She hurriedly wiped away her tears.

But the one that appeared from within the forest wasn't Kamito.

"Jeez, just how far are you going to run!"

"Rinslet....."

Claire opened her eyes.

Catching her breath, Rinslet sunk down beside Claire.

"Whew, that's a fairly unsightly appearance."

"You too."

"Th-That's because you ran so far!"

Rinslet's dress was torn to shreds and leaves and branches clung to her hair.

"Even though I had just put on a new dress....."

She drooped her shoulders.

Claire averted her eyes.

".....What did you come for?"

"I came to laugh at your pitiful chest. Your dress is too showy."

".....Wh-What did you say!"

Her red twintails stood on end like fire.

Rinslet moved her hair up and—

"You've finally returned to normal."

Smiled brilliantly.

"....."

"Did you fight with Kamito-san again?"

"Gu....."

Claire chewed on her lip.

".....It, it's his fault. He won't tell me anything."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, that is.....aren't you interested in Kamito's past?"

"Kamito-san's past?"

Rinslet tilted her head slight to the side—

"Well, it would be a lie to say I wasn't."

"I wonder if he doesn't trust me."

Claire's twintails drooped.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because he won't tell me anything....."

"He can't bring himself to tell you because you're important to him — that is also a possibility."

"That's....."

Claire pouted and pondered.

"....I, I wonder if that's true."

Truly, there was also that way of interpreting it.

But—

"You are such a child, really."

"Sh-Shut up....."

Claire groaned.

"Even I understand that much....."

But she was uneasy, so it couldn't be helped.

If it was about someone she didn't care about, she wouldn't have these feelings.

Because it was Kamito — not talking about his past,

Realizing it just now, her heart beat.

(Wh-What kind of stupid things are you thinking, me!)

Her cheeks flushed red.

"Claire, what's wrong?"

"It, it's nothing!"

Claire shook her head from side to side.

And then.

"—Hmm, so you two are here."

From within the forest, a young girl's voice.

"That voice.....!"

Claire and Rinslet immediately became guarded.

The sound of trees falling one by one, and then—

"Just perfect, I'll play with you to the end."

In front of the two, a giant black monster appeared.

Riding upon its back was a girl with ash grey hair — Muir Alenstarl was laughing lightly.

"With this annihilation spirit — Tiamat."

Part 3

The elegantly played waltz.

The two dancing in the center of the hall were drawing attention from around them.

With Ren Ashbell leading, the dance was intense like a burning flame.

Just like it was when a princess maiden was performing an offering ritual, a true ceremonial dance.

With those fluid movements, Kamito was just barely keeping pace.

"Pretty good movements. As expected of a blade dance master."

"Is that sarcasm? Strongest Blade Dancer—Ren Ashbell ."

To the whisper from the scarlet mask, Kamito replied as such.

Ren Ashbell quickly shifted her feet. Kamito followed her lead and pulled her towards himself. They turned like a flickering flame. Both left their bodies to the music.

Their dancing was already one without splendor.

It was already a fierce blade dance.

"I have various questions I'd like to ask you."

"Impatient, aren't you? Despite that I'd like to enjoy this dance with you a little longer."

"Sorry. I'll have you let me lead from here."

Kamito pulled Ren Ashbell's hand and led her to a terrace devoid of others.

The cool night air cooled their burning skin.

Because of its large size, the terrace felt like a floating island with a clear view of the entire forest.

"Let's cut all the bothersome strategy. I'll get straight to the point."

Kamito stopped dancing and separated from her.

He glared at the scarlet mask — and asked.

"What did you do to Restia?"

"What did you do, meaning?"

"Don't mess around. I know that you command Restia."

"I am not commanding her. She is my comrade."

"You're saying Restia is helping you of her own will?"

"That's right, I am using her and she is using me."

"....."

Kamito bit his lips closed.

(I can't accept that, but—)

There was certainly credibility in it.

It really did seem that Restia was moving without being ordered to. Warning Kamito about Muir was probably done of her own will too.

"What is your purpose in gathering the militarized spirits and orphans from the Instructional School?"

"For war."

And she replied immediately.

".....War?"

Kamito was speechless.

But thinking about it, it wasn't an unexpected reply.

Militarized spirits and Instructional School orphans — either one were useless for anything other than war.

"That's right. Power is necessary for fighting *them*."

"Them?"

"This world's kings."

"Wha—"

(Fighting with the world's kings.....she says?)

Kamito could not understand that objective. Was it for the purpose of restarting the Ranbal War which had involved every country—

"What is the reason for that? To destroy the world?"

"No. It is a war to save this world."

"What are you say—"

"But to begin the war, a starting point is needed."

Ren Ashbell grabbed Kamito by the scruff of the neck and pulled him closer.

"......!?"

"I'll have you allow me to test it, Successor of the Demon King—Ren Ashbell. Whether you have the qualifications to kill them."

Instantly, her right hand pierced Kamito's chest.

Part 4

That was — covered with countless blade-like scales, a many-headed evil spirit dragon.

The black giant far eclipsed Leonora Lancaster's dragon spirit Nidhogg.

Its spread wings hid the moon and its claws gouged the earth.

Five heads spread from the center of its torso and each acted on its own.

".....Tiamat?"

In the face of the rising oppressive force, Claire took a breath.

No mistaking it. What was before them was a first-class militarized spirit.

An existence not unlike Velsaria's Dreadnought they had fought two weeks prior.

The girl riding on its back laughed lightly and smiled and—

"—Kill them, Tiamat."

With an innocent voice, that order was given.

"......!?"

One of the heads breathed fire.

Gooooooooo!

The flames spread across the ground and in an instant the surrounding forest had burned down.

Claire and Rinslet had reacted instantaneously, jumping straight into the lake.

The night sky was dyed red with the color of the flames.

Muir Alenstarl was clapping her hands.

"Ohh, not bad. You're not blade dancers for nothing."

"You.....!"

Claire broke the surface of the water and glared at Muir.

The scarlet dress was soaked and clung to her skin.

".....Claire, help.....cough, cough....."

"You, what are you doing!?"

"I-I can't swim!"

"Hah?"

Rinslet flapped and choked. Claire quickly helped her out.

"How are you drowning in a place where you can stand?"

"Sh-Shut up!"

Rinslet averted her face.

"......Why are you attacking us?"

"Because you onee-sans have made nii-sama weak."

Muir replied in a cold voice.

One of Tiamat's heads with a crooked neck rose up and let loose blades of wind.

"......Scarlet!"

Claire called out and summoned a hell cat clad in crimson flames.

But, it was impossible to shoot down every blade.

"......Ow!"

The scarlet dress was shredded and blood flew from her shoulder like mist.

Many wounds opened across her pure white skin.

"Fufu, your prepared dress has become worthless."

Like a cat playing with its prey, Muir licked her lips.

"Hmph, it was just slowing me down."

Claire gave a fearless smile and tore the hem of her dress.

From the tear, one could see a leather whip strapped to her thigh.

"Like I thought, rather than a dance, a blade dance is much more suited to me."

From within the dancing flames, Claire's whip let out a sound.

"What a coincidence. Me, too."

Rinslet emerged from the water, ripped the hem of her dress and summoned her demon ice spirit Fenrir.

The ice wolf changed forms to the Ice Longbow and moved to Rinslet's hand.

Noisily, a wall of fire erupted into the night sky.

With their respective elemental waffen in hand, the two confronted the giant spirit dragon.

"Stupid onee-chans. You think you can defeat Muir?"

Tiamat let out a roar that seemed to slice the atmosphere.

No, it wasn't a roar. This was—

(No way, a spirit magic chant!?)

A small portion of high-intelligence spirits could perform spirit magic on their own. The dragon race of spirits in particular was known for its proficiency at spirit magic.

The ground shook greatly.

Trees were uprooted and the ground split, sending many stones flying—

"Earth spirit magic Judgement Sword!?"

"What insane destructive power!"

"You can't run, onee-chan."

"......!?"

The red dragon head spit out a fireball.

The stones released by the fireball's explosion on the ground turned the trees into smithereens.

"Kyaaa!"

They were thrown to the ground by the aftershock.

It was the same magic, but the destructive force was incomparable to Claire's.

"Ku......!"

"Aha, what happened to all that attitude from before, onee-chan?"

"Freezing fang, pierce —Freezing Arrow!"

Instantly, Rinslet released the ice arrow.

Innumerable flying fangs of ice. It wouldn't be a killing blow, but with the added effect of Ice Nein, it should at least dull its movements.

But before they struck — Tiamat roared.

A wall of earth rose and blocked the arrows of ice.

"Wh-What! To be able to use fire and earth spirit magic at the same time—"

".....That reminds me that a long time ago, I heard this from ane-sama."

Claire sighed as she wiped the sweat from her brow.

"During the Ranbal War, amongst the knights there was a spirit that could control all of the main elements at once."

"And that is Tiamat?"

"Possibly. But I heard that nobody could use it, so it was abandoned."

".....If that's true, this is bad."

"Yes."

The spirit that could control all of the five main elements—

If it were just Rinslet's demon ice spirit and Claire's flame spirit, there were weak points.

"But to use a spirit like that with just one person—"

Claire readied her Flametounge and glared at Muir.

Compared to the spirits that contracted with a person, militarized spirits did not require a contract to be used.

Its strong-point was that it was general use — the ability of the spirit had no connection to the ability of the contractor, so as long as the disposition was correct, they could use the spirit's power. This was the reason Muir Alenstarl could use several spirits.

But on the other hand, one could not pull out any more power than was present.

For example, the spirit's elemental waffe could not be used, and much of its true abilities were sealed.

But that girl was pulling out all of the militarized spirit's power.

Muir Alenstarl was an expert that specialized at using spirits.

(But just where did she learn those skills—)

"It's about time to stop playing around. Onee-chan."

And Muir's ash grey hair blew in the wind.

".....You were playing until now?"

"That's right, onee-chan."

Rolling up her black sleeve revealed a shining ominous design carved into her right hand.

"Is that a Cursed Armament Seal!?"

"That which pulls out a spirit's powers to the limit — Jester's Vise. This is Muir's power."

In an instant, Tiamat fiercely roared.

Its five heads raged and its body grew larger in an unsightly manner.

It was as if an invisible vise was closing down on it.

"Just what is that!"

One of the heads, a dull white, opened its jaw.

In its throat, a mass of light was building up—

".....Kami—"

That name that almost escaped her mouth — Claire swallowed it back.

(At this kind of time, just asking to be saved is.....)

She made her resolve to die at this time.

Then before her eyes appeared a knight with helmet and shield.

White metal shining, the knight readied its shield and blocked the light!

"Claire, are you okay!?"

"Fianna!"

Fianna came out of the forest.

The one that protected Claire was Georgios.

And one other person.

"Growl, Ray Hawk! I order you — O wind, blow wildly!"

Wrapped in a frenzied wind, Ellis threw her elemental waffe spear.

The multitude of wind blades cut into the evil dragon's torso.

Tiamat raged as its blood sprayed into the air.

"Fianna, Ellis — you're a life saver."

"It's still too early for thanks."

Ellis sighed with a sharp gaze.

"Fufu, you've only bought a short time."

Letting the Cursed Armament Seal shine ominously—

Muir Alenstarl licked her lips.

"Onee-chans, I'll kill you all together."

Part 5

"Kaha.....!"

Kamito pressed down on his chest and crouched down on the terrace.

His heart burned like it was on fire. All of his blood was boiling.

At the same time, a tremendous pain assaulted the interior of his body.

"What did you do to me.....?"

"I merely released a little. The qualities of the Demon King that sleep within you, that is."

".....Qualities of the Demon King?"

Kamito glared up at the crimson mask while crouching on the ground.

Breathing was painful. His heart was beating like mad.

"Ah.....guu.....gaa, ahhhhhh!"

A scream built up in his throat.

"As expected, your body is rejecting it."

Ren Ashbell was calmly watching the writhing Kamito .

"Well, fine. If you can't stand that much, then you were only worth so little—"

"Y-You....."

"Stand. Kazehaya Kamito."

She kicked the groaning Kamito in the stomach without a shred of mercy.

"Ga.....!"

"You can lie there if you want, but things you hold precious will be hurt."

"What, was that.....?"

While breathing through his throat which felt like it was on fire, Kamito somehow managed to raise his upper body.

"Look there—"

Ren Ashbell pointed out towards the forest visible from the terrace.

The direction of the lake from that afternoon. Black flames and fierce flames were rising.

"Your companions and Muir Alenstarl are currently engaged in combat."

"What, did you say.....!?"

At the same moment he yelled that, the worst pain thus far assaulted Kamito. He collapsed onto the ground.

"Your companions cannot defeat Muir Alenstarl. You, who knows her, know that fact best."

"......!"

He couldn't deny it.

Muir Alenstarl was the Monster from the Instructional School.

Between the high-class young ladies of the academy and Muir who had been trained specifically as a weapon, there was an enormous gap.

"I won't let that.....I will never, lose another.....!"

Kamito pressed down on his beating chest and staggered back to his feet.

The interior of the crimson mask — burning red eyes pierced through Kamito's.

And then she grabbed his arm.

"That's the spirit. Don't let me down, strongest blade dancer!"

Kamito was flung off the terrace.

Part 6

"—Blow the flute of the end, dragon vanguard of the king!"

Muir Alenstarl's innocent voice resounded across the night sky.

Fire, earth, water, wind, holy — under the influence of Muir's ability Jester's Vise, each head released forth their breath.

"—Thou, become the shield of my person, knight of the ancient pledge!"

The atmosphere shook and trees were felled in circular patterns.

The knight's shield was destroyed and its armor was falling apart—

It could only withstand a few more seconds.

The knight, whom should-be overwhelming in defense , was blown into bits and disappeared into nothingness.

"......Georgios!"

"Aha, that wasn't even a toy, onee-chan."

Muir sneered at the devastated and drained Fianna.

"Ellis, Rinslet — we rush at the same time!"

"Got it!" "Understood!"

Yelling, Claire drew Flametounge.

The crimson slash sealed its movements for a moment.

"Freezing fang, pierce —Freezing Arrow!"

"—O wind, blow wildly!"

Rinslet released the Freezing Arrow towards the fire head and Ellis' wind blades aimed for the earth head.

That is, they aimed for the heads which were weak against their element.

However—

"It won't work."

The earth and wind dragons chanted different spirit spells.

At the same time the ice arrows were blocked by the wall of earth, the blades of wind were struck down by opposing blades of wind.

And while the three were on defense, the dull white head fired its Holy Ray.

The ground exploded and a pillar of earth and sand flew up from it.

Claire and the others were blasted though the air and hit the ground harshly.

The crater radiated outwards. The mixed-in fragments of fire painted the air red.

"......To be able to control a militarized spirit like her hands and feet....."

Claire groaned while gripping the ground.

It was a despairing difference in battle strength. The top class' spirits at the academy were like babies in comparison.

(But.....)

Suddenly, the scales cracked and Tiamat's frame grew.

Muir's Jester's Vise carried a heavy burden.

"Is that okay? At this rate, that militarized spirit will be destroyed!"

The heavily wounded Rinslet yelled as such.

Muir shrugged her shoulders—

"It's fine. A spirit is just a throwaway toy."

"What did you say.....!"

Claire opened her eyes in shock. She raised her bloody head without thinking.

"And you still call yourself an elementalist?"

"Muir is a weapon. The same as this Tiamat and nii-sama, a massacre weapon."

"......!?"

At those words — Claire's expression froze.

"You.....what did you just say?"

"What?"

"The same as nii-sama, what do you mean?"

"Aha, did you perhaps not know?"

Muir's lips curled in a cruel manner.

"Nii-sama is the same as Muir — an assassin raised by the Instructional School."

Part 7

".....Damn.....it....."

Kamito who had been tossed off the terrace groaned in anguish.

One or two bones might have been broken.

This was the Kamito who had received the harshest taijutsu training at the Instructional School. Even if he fell from the third floor of a building, it wouldn't result in an

injury. But right now, Kamito's body was burning up and in extreme pain such that he couldn't even lift a finger.

(.....What exactly was done to me?)

Within his hazy mind, Ren Ashbell's words came to him.

Released the qualities of the Demon King — that's what she said.

(.....What does that mean?)

No, rather than that, right now—

Kamito dug his shaking fingertips into the ground.

The flames burning the forest were increasing in intensity more and more.

While this was happening, Claire and the others—

It was frustrating not being able to move. It couldn't be helped that it felt like the air was burning.

Even now, elegant music could be heard coming from the interior of the castle.

Despite the battle going on at the purification grounds, nobody inside the castle seemed to have noticed.

No, even Kamito who had been on the terrace had failed to hear the battle. There might have been a barrier around the surroundings.

(But to form a barrier of this magnitude.....)

The only ones capable of such a feat were Queen rank princess maidens.

"Gu, ah....."

A racing heartbeat.

At the same time a horrible pain spread.

"—Kamito!"

"....!?"

The sound of footsteps approached and the one who appeared was the white dress-clad Est.

"My apologies. Because of somebody's barrier around this area, I didn't notice it sooner."

"Est, gu....."

"Kamito.....don't tell me, that power—"

Est opened her mysterious violet eyes.

Leaning down beside the fallen Kamito, she pulled him back up.

Her white-silver hair lightly touched his cheek. The sweet milk-like scent tickled his nose.

".....Est?"

"Kamito, please stay still like that."

With that, Est touched the feverish chest of Kamito.

Her beautiful hair gleamed in the night's darkness.

Strangely, the pain seemed to leave with the soft feeling of her hand.

"Is this Terminus Est's power?"

"Yes. I believe this will keep it in check for now but—"

That which destroyed Velsaria's Cursed Armament Seal, a holy blade's power.

It was not as though the pain completely disappeared, but he could somehow move about at this level.

"Kamito, are you okay?"

"Yeah, thanks to Est....."

Kamito raised his upper body and rose to his knees on the ground.

"Kamito, you still shouldn't move."

"I have to go save Claire and the others."

"No, Kamito!"

Est let out a panicked voice. It was the first time for her who was always expressionless to express so much.

"Est....."

"The curse is only temporarily suppressed so if you use divine power right now, you won't be able to control my current power."

"......Yeah, I know."

But, even then—

An instant. From the other side of the forest, a fearsome roar resounded.

As if to burn the night sky, the giant's flames grew higher.

"Est, I'm begging you. The only one who can fight Muir is me."

"Kamito, but....."

"Lend me your power."

"....."

Even if he could not get her approval, he planned to head there anyway.

"......Kamito, you're unfair."

Est—

Sighed and held Kamito's hand.

"—I am Kamito's sword, as long as you wish."

"Thanks Est."

Kamito nodded and chanted the words of summoning.

"—Dispassionate Queen of Steel, the sacred sword that destroys evil!"

"—Now form a sword of steel and be the power in my hand!"

Est's form was covered in light and disappeared into nothingness.

And in the next moment, a blade of shining silver emitting light was gripped in Kamito's hand.

"Let's go, Est!"

Fixing his grip on Terminus Est, Kamito ran into the darkness of the night.

To bring closure to his past.

Chapter 10: Showdown with the Past

Part 1

Inside the forest crackling from the fire—

"……Kamito is an assassin trained at the Instructional School?"

Claire muttered that, dumbfounded.

Ellis, Fianna and Rinslet all exchanged glances while collapsed on the ground.

Instructional School — if one were to ask the empire's people, there would be no one who had not heard that name.

Four years ago. At the same time as the Calamity Queen's rebellion, the empire's dark side was revealed.

In the intercontinental regions, orphans that appeared to possess the right disposition were gathered and trained as assassins by a gathering of fanatics.

"That kind of thing……"

It was not something that could be believed immediately.

But if it were true—

Kamito's uncommon strength.

It also explained why he hid his past so obstinately.

(.....So that's what it was. That's why Kamito—)

Claire stood still and shut her mouth tightly.

"Aha, was it shocking? Onee-chan."

Muir said that with a sneer.

"Nii-sama is a monster just like me. He's not human."

Suddenly, Tiamat's earth dragon head began chanting spirit magic.

Ghastly plants with living tendril extensions growing from it emerged from the ground and attacked Claire and the others.

Being completely drained of energy, the four were at the mercy of the plants and were lifted into the air.

"Nooo!" "What is this!" "Da-Damn you, insolent thing!"

The slimy plants tore the girls' dresses and touched their bare skin like tentacles.

They struggled against the unpleasant feeling, but were unable to put up any resistance.

"Fufu, that's a good look. Onee-chans."

"N, fuaa.....this.....!"

Claire swung her Flametounge in an attempt to burn the plants but—

The flames disappeared like smoke and were completely extinguished.

(.....I'm losing divine power!)

Spirits were unusable by anyone except pure maidens. Even if you had a close bond with the contracted spirit, this didn't change.

The purification ceremony that the spirit contracting princess maidens underwent before sacred rituals or blade dances was to achieve this condition.

The teasing disgraceful treatment wasn't without purpose. Muir was corrupting their bodies so they would be unable to use their contracted spirits.

But there was no time to feel shy from showing an unladylike appearance as the plants dug into their limbs.

Breathing was becoming difficult with the creaking sound of their bones.

"......Ah, guu....."

"You're crying out in a nice voice. I'd like to let Nii-sama hear it as well."

Said the innocently laughing young girl's voice.

(Kami.....to.....)

Inside her conscience that was growing faint—

Claire called that name.

(—Save me, Kamito!)

Just then, the flash of a sword.

(.....Eh?)

A sudden floating feeling.

Following that, Claire's body fell down into the mud.

Ellis, Fianna and Rinslet were also successively freed from the plants.

"....."

Claire blinked.

Over there—

"Sorry, I made you wait."

Kamito stood there holding a gleaming silvery white sword.

Part 2

Kamito breathed heavily and stood a short distance from the roaring Tiamat.

His face was pale as if lacking blood and he was drenched in cold sweat. Thanks to Est suppressing his condition, he could more or less continue to stand.

"Kamito....."

Claire let out a surprised voice.

".....So you've heard about me?"

"....."

Silence answered him.

With just that, Kamito understood.

They had learned about his past.

"Kamito, is it true? That you were....."

"Yeah, it's true."

Kamito turned away from Claire and nodded.

"I'm the same as Muir, an orphan from the Instructional School."

He heard a gasp.

It wasn't just Claire. Ellis, Fianna and Rinslet as well.

They widened their eyes as the cruel truth was appended to Kamito's profile.

A disgusting child of darkness. Possibly a pitiful monster.

He didn't know which was better.

Whatever the case, their relationship would change from now on.

(.....Well, it was bound to get out sooner or later.)

Kamito sighed deeply with resignation—

And continued forward to stand before Muir Alenstarl and Tiamat.

"Claire, I'm sorry for keeping it secret until now. But—"

He gripped Terminus Est in both hands.

"I will definitely protect you all. That will never change."

"Kamito, y-you....."

Then.

Claire's trembling voice—

"Aren't you a fool!"

"Hah?"

Kamito let out a voice that fully ignored the atmosphere of the moment.

Over there — a whip sounded.

The leather whip struck his back just like always.

"That hurts! What's that for!"

While shouting, he turned around—

Gogogogogogogogo.....!

Claire's shoulders were trembling.

Her twintails stood on edge like a flame.

".....O-Oi, Claire?"

Cold sweat ran down his cheek.

.....She was angry. The hell cat girl was extremely angry.

"Y-Y-You.....what do you mean by that?"

Claire rapidly advanced towards him.

Her ruby eyes glared at Kamito.

"A-About what?"

"The reason you wouldn't talk about your past!"

Slight tears were present at the corners of her eyes.

"If I knew about your past, you thought that I'd look at you with those kind of eyes?"

"N-No, because I came from that Instructional School... ..."

Kamito was overwhelmed and backed away.

"So what?"

"Eh?"

"Well, of course, I was a bit surprised, you know? I was surprised but—"

Claire pointed at Kamito's chest.

"Kamito is still Kamito. Aren't your worries stupid?"

"....."

Kamito was dumbfounded and—

"Kamito-san.....that really is stupid."

"Yeah, that's right. Stupid beyond belief."

"Oh, Kamito-kun, that's so stupid ♪ ."

The three other young ladies also said as much with astonished expressions.

"Y-you guys....."

"Listen well, Kamito."

Claire glared at Kamito with upturned eyes.

"....!?"

Her face was close. It was a distance where lips would meet if they were any closer.

Or rather, if he actually looked, Claire was completely naked other than her panties.

Even in this kind of situation, his heart throbbed.

"Your past has nothing to do with it."

Claire gazed at Kamito with a serious expression.

"After all, you're our teammate and my important—"

"......Claire?"

While squirming, Claire's face lit up red. Kamito swallowed hard.

And then—

"Because you're my slave spirit!"

She screamed that.

"......Yeah, that's right."

Kamito smiled wryly.

(.....I was really being stupid.)

He felt that he should have trusted his companions more.

It had only been two months since he had met Claire and the other young ladies.

But they had passed all that time together.

Even if they learned about his past, that time wasn't something that would change so easily.

Despite the fact that he should have known that—

".....Claire, sorry."

"Hmph, what a troublesome slave spirit."

Claire averted her eyes a little shyly.

"Nii-sama....."

And Muir Alenstarl muttered that.

"What are you saying? Nii-sama is a monster just like Muir!"

"Muir....."

Kamito looked up at the girl riding on Tiamat's back.

".....I'm already not the same as the me from back then."

"That's a lie, nii-sama can't....."

Muir widened her eyes and—

Glared, not in Kamito's direction, but Claire and the others' direction.

".....I get it, nii-sama. You've been tricked by them."

"—Muir!"

The Cursed Armament Seal on her right hand began to glow ominously.

Tiamat roared madly and its interior portion grew larger.

The scales covering its body blew off and chunks of meat scattered.

"Muir's nii-sama — cannot be forgiven. I'll crush everyone."

"....."

Muir Alenstarl — a girl, who for some reason called him nii-sama, was a dear existence to him.

Having hardly changed, she still possessed a cute childish face.

A slight pain crossed his heart.

However—

"Sorry, Muir. The young ladies I must protect are here."

Kamito raised the Demon Slayer — Terminus Est in both hands.

"You can't abandon your past, nii-sama!"

"Yeah, I have no intention of abandoning it. This sword is—"

The sword in his hand shone with light—

"To protect those precious to me and carve the way to the future!"

Kamito jumped.

At the same time, Tiamat's Fire Dragon released a breath of flames!

He didn't avoid it — pouring divine power into his blade, he blew away the flames.

(.....Muir Alenstarl, a militarized spirit contracting expert.)

With a power that drew out a spirit's power to its limit — Jester's Vise's user.

One who was without equal in large-scale destruction, the number two of the Instructional School.

And the spirit she was controlling now, the annihiliation spirit Tiamat, was a top-class spirit.

The opposing Kamito was heavily injured.

He wasn't the strongest blade dancer, Ren Ashbell, anymore, but could he win with such rusty skills?

(—It doesn't matter!)

Kamito kicked the ground and accelerated.

For some reason, he didn't feel like he would lose. There was no prediction that showed him collapsed on the ground.

(Companions that trust in me are here — just that is making my body unbelievably light.)

"Ohhhhhh!"

Aiming at Kamito, the Wind Dragon began chanting spirit magic.

Innumerable wind blades were released. His limbs would be lost if they even grazed him.

"—O wind, to the brave warrior, grant your divine protection!"

From behind, he could hear the chant of a gallant knight captain.

A whirlwind gathered around him and protected his body. Ellis' specialty flying spirit. Kamito jumped and accelerated again — he dodged all the wind blades by jumping over them.

The gleaming white blade in the dark of night. With that, the Wind Dragon's head flew into the air.

(One—)

"Wha....."

Muir opened her eyes in shock.

Mad with anger, Tiamat broke free of her control and attacked Kamito fiercely.

The Earth Dragon opened its rock-solid mouth filled with dull fangs. It dropped its head and in that instant, Kamito—

—A blade flash drew an arc and the Earth Dragon's head fell like an iron hammer.

(Two—)

"Why!? Nii-sama, nii-sama isn't even awakened yet—"

"Muir, during our time at the Instructional School, did you win against me even once?"

"....!?"

Muir's Jester's Vise paired with the annihilation spirit Tiamat was indeed an unmatched weapon.

But that was only in terms of large-scale destruction.

Against Kamito who specialized in assassination, it was a bad match.

If each of the five heads was cut off one by one — it was not an unbeatable opponent.

The Water Dragon and Fire Dragon attacked at the same time from both directions. Kamito sunk his body — and flew using the power of the wind armor. Circling around behind the heads in an instant, he beheaded them both at once.

(That's four—)

These were the sword techniques for assassination taught at the Instructional School. Kamito's true blade dance. Moves that were sealed in academy battles.

Kamito quickly corrected his stance — and just then.

The neck of the Water Dragon flapping in the air released a water breath.

Cutting the head off was not enough to be a killing blow. With that, Kamito's body was blown into the ground.

(.....Kuu!)

He tried to stand quickly but—

In the mouth of the remaining Holy Dragon, light gathered for its Holy Ray.

It was an attack that would wipe away a human in an instant.

"—Kamito!"

The burning Flametounge drew a red line across the sky.

The flaming whip hit the Holy Dragon's neck and stopped its movements momentarily.

With that—

"Freezing fangs, pierce — Freezing Arrow!"

Rinslet's ice arrows struck the still-open mouth of the dragon and froze it.

No. It wasn't just a freezing arrow—

"—Wait naught for winter and bloom now, Ice Break!"

In concert with Rinslet's words, the demonic ice shattered.

The resulting ice blades sliced all over Tiamat's body.

"Ohhhhhhhh!"

The giant dragon's body stopped moving and in a split-second—

Kamito's demon-slaying blade destroyed the remaining Holy Dragon head.

Epilogue

"No way, why....."

Muir Alenstarl who had lost the annihilation spirit Tiamat—

Was standing stock still in the mud in shock.

That appearance was akin to a girl who had just dropped her favorite toy in the river.

The Monster that had been trying to kill Claire and the others until just now was nowhere in sight.

"Nii-sama was supposed to stay weak forever and ever ....."

"Muir, I may have really become weak."

Kamito thrust his sword into the ground and held his hand out to the frightened Muir.

Muir tilted her head to the side.

"But now I have those around me who convert that weakness into strength."

"....."

Muir blinked her eyes—

"Wh-What's with that....."

Sulkily, she averted her eyes.

"I hate nii-sama. I hate you."

"Muir....."

And then.

His heart squirmed.

".....Aguu, ahhhhhh!"

Instantaneously. His entire body felt like it was burning up and intense pain ran throughout him.

With an anguished cry, Kamito fell to the ground.

"—Kamito!?"

Claire pulled the collapsed Kamito back up.

"......Wait, what's going on exactly!?"

"......It's nothing....."

"Idiot, there's no way that's true!"

"Kamito-san!"

"Kamito, what's wrong!"

Rinslet and Ellis, along with Fianna, all hurriedly rushed to his side.

"—Show me."

Fianna unbuttoned his shirt with a serious expression.

And then—

"......What is this!?"

Upon seeing Kamito's unveiled chest — she became speechless.

Roughly around his heart's location, an ominous black pattern was engraved.

"No way, a Cursed Armament Seal.....!"

"What did you say!?"

Anxiety flashed across all four of their faces.

And.

"That woman, doing such things without asking me—"

Muir stood while biting her lips.

"......That woman? You, do you know anything?"

Claire sharply inquired and Muir flinched before shaking her shoulders.

Without her militarized spirit, she was now just a normal powerless girl.

"......Gu, ahh, ahhhhhhhh!"

Kamito vomited and tore at his own chest.

"It's dangerous at this rate. We need to report this to the Divine Ritual Institute quickly!"

"Got it!"

Ellis stood up and summoned her flying wind spirit—

And.

"—Move aside."

A quiet voice resounded.

"......?"

The location the voice came from — everyone looked towards that spot.

There stood Est who had returned to human form.

Coldly shining silvery white hair.

Mysterious violet pupils.

Est's profile lit by the moon gave off a godly feeling.

In the face of that beauty—

"Est....."

Kamito forgot about his burning pain for a moment.

"Kamito."

Est whispered.

With small, cold fingertips, Est touched Kamito's jaw and,

"I am your sword. Therefore—"

On Kamito's lips.

She planted hers.

"Es.....t.....!?"

Dizziness. His mind was attacked by a sweet drunken feeling.

He could only widen his eyes in shock.

The warmth of the touching lips.

The softness of the touching lips.

The silvery white hair caressing his cheeks.

Small fingertips were wrapped around his back.

Those delicate limbs which seemed like they could break at any moment.

The heat from those fingertips. Or possibly coolness.

He was wrapped in those strange and gentle sensations.

He felt his entire body relax.

Their lips parted lightly.

But the hair upon his cheeks did not part.

"......Est?"

And then—

「さようなら、カミト」
エストの身体は無数の光の粒子となって、虚空に消えた。
「――エスト！」

END

"Good bye, Kamito."

Est's body disintegrated into many light shards and disappeared into thin air.

"—Est!"

Afterword

Author's

—Nii-sama is Muir's only.

And so, it has been three months since last time. This is Shimizu Yuu.

We've reached the fourth volume of the school harem x battle comedy "Seirei Tsukai no Blade Dance"!

Finally, after two months of school life, it's the Blade Dance. Attacking Kamito and the others who have made their respective resolves is a military-use spirit of unknown affiliation. The covert Instructional School's assassins and Kamito's revealed past. And also the other Ren Ashbell's objective is—

The young ladies' love battle also accelerates with bold swimsuits and magnificent dresses, while the plot advances into the climax, so please continue to support it !

Now for the customary thanks.

Firstly, Sakura Hanpen-sensei who once again drew wonderful illustrations, thank you so much. Rinslet on the cover is so cute. Why those cute and erotic tights are so damaged — I was pulled in and delayed writing. Pero-pero.

Thanks to MFJ's charismatic incubator, "Seirei Tsukai" has managed to reach four volumes.

Head editor Misaka, proofreading team, formatting team, marketing team and bookstores, thank you for everything. Shinjuku's Anibro Gamers store have made a huge released of volume 3. Once again, I thank you.

Also, Yoshihira Zenzai-sensei who is drawing a high-quality manga version in the Comic Alive magazine . Having the characters drawn in a cute style makes me very happy. I'll just mention this here, but the manga is a little more erotic than the light novel.....it's very erotic! (Eye-opening shock level).

Lastly, to all those who are reading this book, I give you my greatest thanks!

To everyone who submitted their impressions in the questionnaire, a big thanks to you as well. I have read all

of them gratefully. Speaking of the questionnaires, in the second volume, Est was leading by a large margin, but in the third volume, she just rocketed to the top. Fianna and Claire occupy the third and fourth spots in a very close battle. The main character, Kamito, is in fifth. It's a shame that the cute Rinslet is in sixth.....now is the time for the one million (lie) Rinslet fans across the country to unite!

Now then, the next volume is the fifth. Let's meet again in "The Demon Slaying Sword (tentative)"!

July 2011, Shimizu Yuu

Illustrator's

Nice to meet you or long time no see! It's Sakura Hanpen!

I received another two page afterword so I drew my beloved Rinslet with all my heart!

Rinslet-san...! Rinslet-san, Rinslet-san who's greater than cute...!

This is my pero-pero desire. The tights on the cover page were at too high a level.

I-It's not like it not satisfactory!? But it could be more cute.

With that shocking ending, it can't be helped if I want to read the next volume.

Oh no, what's gonna happen to Est...!? The readers are really interested...Shimizu-sensei...

No matter what happens, I won't apologize about my pero-pero, so please apologize, Shimizu-sensei. Ehh.

Also, this is an announcement but the one who left me in charge of illustrations, HOOKSOFT-san's "SuGirly Wish" is coming out next (`・´). Please look into that as well...!

Well then, I'll stop around here!

This has been the Sakura Hanpen who can't help being curious about the next volume!

Translation Notes and References

1. ↑ Similar to Naked-apron, a naked shirt is where the subject wears nothing but a shirt.
2. ↑ Exclamation for expressing an astonishment or showing unexpectedness
3. ↑ nyotaimori = "body sushi", is the practice of serving sashimi or sushi from the body of a woman